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PREVIEW
GOD OF WAR
It's a deity job, but Sony's got to do it

REVIEWED
WIPEOUT PURE
Why you need to own a PSP

180 PAGES FULL OF HISTORIC GAMING

One man can make a difference – Total War evolves

SPARTAN™ TOTAL WARRIOR

REVIEWED
UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2: THE LIANDRI CONFLICT [PS2/XB] METEOS [DS]
MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION [PS2/XB] CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5 [PC] KESSEN III [PS2]


eMag

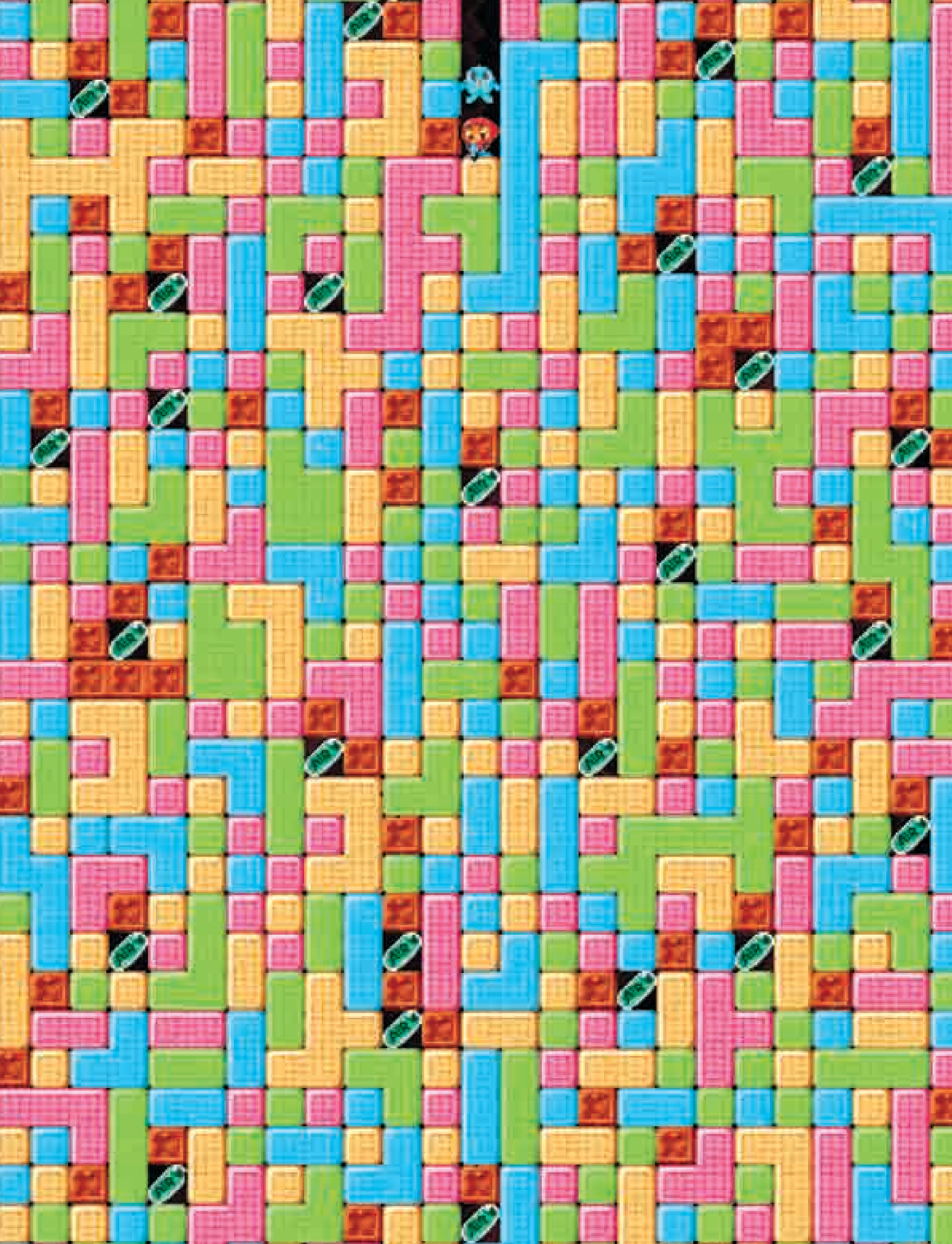
Even back in the Forties, when the International Mutoscope Company released mechanical driving games like *Drive Mobile*, it was clear that racing games were going to be popular. Fast forward to the present (being careful to acknowledge the impact of *Gran Trak10*, *Super Sprint 2*, *Out Run* and *Stunt Car Racer*) and you find that the shelves are positively teeming with racing games – the genre is showing no sign of flagging.

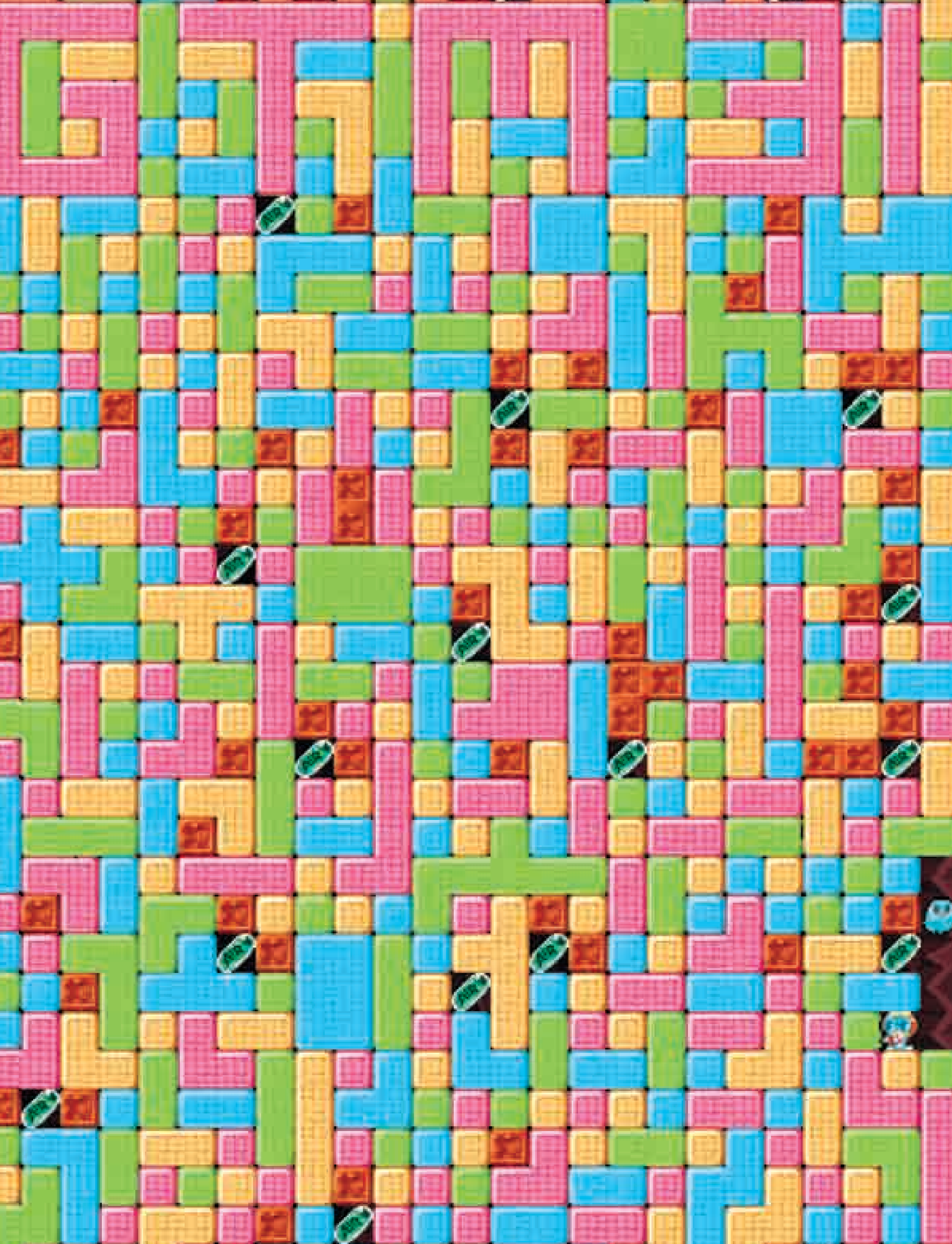
With *Gran Turismo 4* currently wowing petrolheads and *Forza* looking to best Polyphony's outstanding contribution to the racing genre, we spoke to some key developers (including *Gran Turismo* creator Kazanori Yamauchi) to get them to share their thoughts on racing games.

If you love taking your digital motor for a spin, these industry insider views are unmissable.

Simon Phillips,
Group Editor




AIR

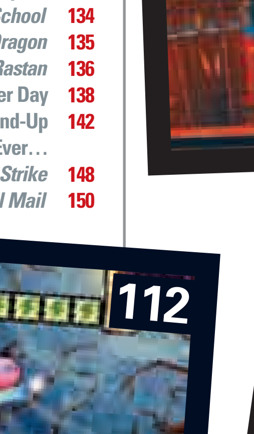

AIR

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Sony wields the power of the gods, but will its blood-soaked action slasher bring it divine inspiration or Greek tragedy?

REGULARS



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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

"THE UK IS THE GATEWAY TO THE EUROPEAN VIDEOGAMES MARKET AND ELSPA INTENDS TO MAINTAIN ITS STRONG INDUSTRY-FACING EVENT THIS YEAR"
ROGER BENNETT, DIRECTOR GENERAL, ELSPA

NOTHING TO SEE HERE

ELSPA DREAMS IN TATTERS AFTER GAME ZONE LIVE BITES THE DUST

THE SHOW GOES ON

MIXED FORTUNES FOR UK-BASED GAME SHOWS

From two rival shows to nothing at all – there's just no happy medium for game-centric events, it would seem. The recent announcement of Elspa's decision to cancel its upcoming Game Zone Live (originally called Game Stars Live when it debuted last September) is a blow for the industry body, not just in terms of pride and reputation but also for the hopes of a solid consumer show in 2005.

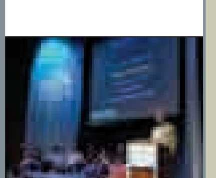
The somewhat muted announcement, made late last month, came amid speculation that the event had failed to raise the publisher backing necessary to make it credible, with the likes of Microsoft and EA both withdrawing the support they had shown for last year's gaming show.

What this means for the agreed ITV programme due to air at the same time as the event is unclear, although Elspa has been quick to make it known that the European Games Network, its trade event that ran alongside Game Stars last year and managed to trounce the European Computer Trade Show (ECTS), will not be affected by the consumer event's cancellation.

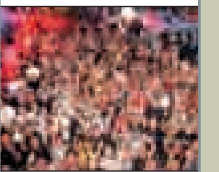
"While EGN will not take place at ExCel, our options for a show this year are very much being discussed," said Elspa director general Roger Bennett. "We are at this precise time finalising how EGN will progress to closely reflect the needs of our business. This will be done by Elspa in the best interests of the UK and European computer and videogames industry for this year and for the years ahead."

A ray of hope as far as consumer events goes, however, now appears to be radiating from Birmingham's NEC, thanks to a new event called State Of Play due to be held between 14-16 October. Promising a number of unique events including a live music stage, an adults-only pleasure dome and a battle ring (whatever that happens to be), as well as a challenge aiming to uncover the UK's best gamers – exactly like Game Stars Live had – State Of Play's organisers are looking to attract around 80,000 visitors over the show's three days.

Whether that will happen remains to be seen – after all, even the hugely advertised Game Stars only attracted around 50,000 people – although the fact that Microsoft has already signed up to exhibit at a show that happens to coincide with the rumoured release window for the Xbox 2 should at least give other potential exhibitors confidence in the event's success.



The EIEF is going from strength to strength.



Look, these people *love* games. And cameras.



No more Game Stars. No more snazzy branding.

THE WILDS OF SCOTLAND

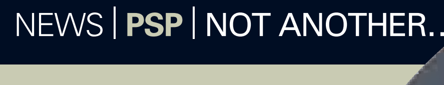
Building upon the success that it enjoyed last year, the third Edinburgh Interactive Entertainment Festival (it's ditched the original Games Festival moniker) is planned for the week beginning 10 August. The event, which is moving from its previous home of the Royal Museum to the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, will see a number of exhibitions returning from last year – including Go Play Games and various game screenings that are open to the public – as well as new elements that will hopefully expand the festival's appeal. "Edinburgh isn't an E3 or EGN," said Greg Ingham, the EIEF's chairman, "nor is it a trade show or sales-focused talking shop. It's an opportunity for the industry to present innovative new developments, challenge preconceptions and look further than next year's slate. Our new name reflects the crossover appeal of the event and the fact that our industry is about much more than games."

ICH BIN EIN GAMER

Meanwhile, another European rival to Elspa's efforts is making a return with the announcement of the third Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany. Despite being seen by some developers and publishers as rather out of the way, last year's Leipzig event was a huge success and had enough potential to raise the show's esteem significantly in the eyes of the industry. Running from 17-21 August, the convention will once again offer consumers access to a wealth of new products to try, while the GCDC – an event specifically for members of the industry – will be held over the two days prior to the consumer show.

OUR TWO CENTS

The fact that Game Zone Live has been cancelled really doesn't come as much of a disappointment to us personally – last year's event felt strangely sterile and lacking in atmosphere – although it's obviously a shame that Elspa's plans for a unified consumer event have been ruined. Hopefully, State Of Play might go some way to alleviating the fear that UK-based consumer shows will once again fall by the wayside, but we would suggest that the quality of industry events needs to be stepped up just as much as the consumer ones. As it stands, nothing can stand up to the might of E3 or the Tokyo Game Show. We're constantly told that Europe needs to consolidate its position within the global gaming industry, and a large, important trade show would be a huge advantage. However, as it looks like we're having difficulty organising a consumer show just for UK gamers, how hard will it be to create a centralised event for games fans across the EU?



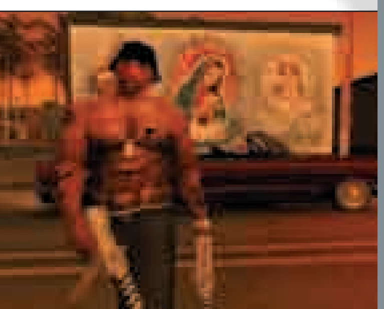
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



HILLARY SAYS

It seems that Hillary Clinton's latest targets on her quest to become the 2008 Democratic presidential nominee are games – specifically, *Grand Theft Auto*. "Children are playing a game that encourages them to have sex with prostitutes and then murder them," said the former First Lady. "This is a silent epidemic of media desensitisation that teaches kids it's okay to diss people because they're a woman, a different colour or from a different place." Scapegoating to earn support? Surely not…

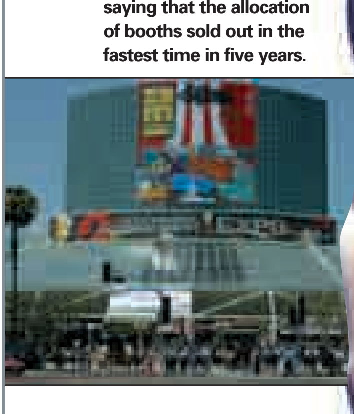


Turns out the PSX isn't quite dead yet. Watch this space…



GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

Those of you lucky enough to attend this year's E3 should look forward to an even more packed show than in previous years, thanks to a record level of floor space being sold by the show's organisers. Across the five exhibition halls, more than 540,000 square feet of space have been bought by over 400 exhibitors from 87 countries, with the Entertainment Software Association saying that the allocation of booths sold out in the fastest time in five years.

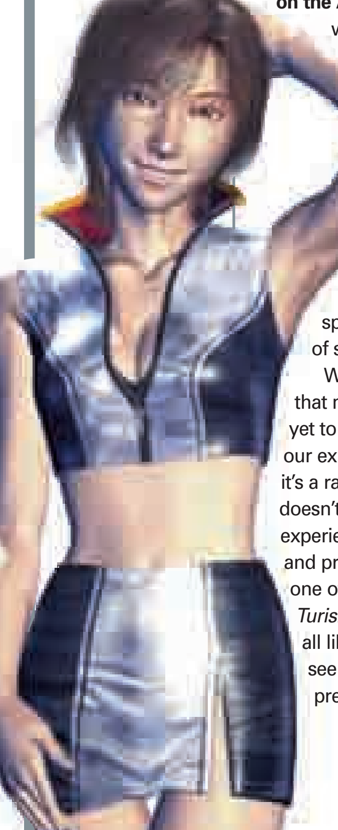




AMERICA EMBRACES PSP, EUROPE LEFT WANTING

HANDS ON THE MONEY





After delays and much anxious waiting, Sony has finally unleashed the PSP on the American public. A million units were made available for launch but even at the time of going to press – a week after the launch – this allocation hadn't sold through in its entirety. Even though independent retailers and specialist stores have reported speedy sell-outs, many mainstream shops still seem to sport a unexpectedly plentiful amount of stock.

With its high price, it's unsurprising that many casual and non-gamers have yet to warm to the new handheld but if our experiences are anything to go by, it's a rare occasion when somebody doesn't walk away from their first PSP experience fishing through their pockets and praying they have enough money for one of their own. And with titles like *Gran Turismo 4, Grand Theft Auto* and *Burnout* all likely to be unveiled at E3, we can't see it being long before sales reach predicted numbers.

Closer to home, things aren't quite so rosy and PAL gamers are still being denied the opportunity to even see the PSP. Despite Sony being quite forthcoming with review code for its key first-party titles, trying to get any concrete information about the hardware launch remains an uphill struggle. While many retailers are predicting a June release, September dates are being thrown up more and more – there's even talk of projects being cancelled and US releases not making it as far as our humble shores as publishers try to keep their schedules relatively clear.

It's thought that these ongoing delays can be attributed at least in part to continued hardware shortages. With both Japanese and US markets to support, manufacturing enough handhelds to facilitate a full European launch could prove quite a struggle at the rate Sony is currently producing PSPs.

Korea, on the other hand, is currently in the grip of PSP fever. After being delayed to ensure hardware supply for the key US launch, the handheld will see a 2 May release with one slight improvement: bundled with the Korean package is an extra UMD disc containing a web-browsing



WipEout Pure is an astonishing game but you can only find out for yourself by visiting your local importer.

European gamers are being cruelly denied the chance to play gaudy golf on the move thanks to Sony's reluctance to announce a release date for the PSP.

package as well as on-demand music and video services. These are in conjunction with Korea Telecommunications, the country's primary internet provider, but it remains unclear whether Sony is striking similar deals in other territories – it would certainly make a lot of sense for Sony to join forces with big online firms across Europe to help soften the blow of continued delays with some additional functionality.

In Japan, where the PSP continues to excel, there's more interesting news from Sony. Apparently, reports of the PSX being discontinued (after it was reported on Sony's own website) aren't entirely true. The old models have simply been superseded by two new machines, identical to their forerunners in every way except for one enhancement – the ability to export video directly to Memory Stick in a format the PSP can understand and play.

With widespread circulation of PC and Mac programs that serve exactly the same purpose, it's unlikely that this will prompt a massive turnaround in the fate of the convergence console, but it's a nice improvement regardless. We're guessing that a slightly improved machine that we can't even buy won't help those of us still longing for our very own PSP, though…

"ALTHOUGH SONY HAS BEEN QUITE **FORTHCOMING WITH PSP REVIEW CODE,** TRYING TO GET A **EUROPEAN RELEASE DATE** IS AN UPHILL STRUGGLE"

"WHA' HAPPEN'D?"

SO WHAT REASONS DOES SONY HAVE FOR NOT LETTING EUROPE GET ITS BEAUTIFUL HANDHELD UNTIL LATER IN THE YEAR?

IMPROVEMENTS
Sony is making sure that the PSP is the best it can be for its European audience by fixing every problem people have ever brought up.
LIKELIHOOD 4/10

SHORTAGES
Sony simply can't make enough handhelds to supply every territory and satisfy global demand.
LIKELIHOOD 9/10

TACTICS
Sony is holding off the release until nearer Christmas, ensuring that it will launch at a notoriously busy time of year with *GTA* and *GT4* at launch.
LIKELIHOOD 6/10

COMPASSION
Sony feels bad for Nintendo for all the criticism it has received over the past few years and has decided to give the DS a head start. Yeah, right.
LIKELIHOOD 1/10



NOT ANOTHER…

GET YOUR GIZMONDO HERE

THREE CHAINS TO STOCK TIGER'S OVERPRICED HANDHELD THINGY



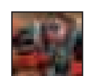
After its high-profile launch last month where Sting had all the fun, the Gizmondo is now set to be sold through three UK retailers, namely John Lewis, Carphone Warehouse (which isn't actually a warehouse) and Gamestation. This will be in addition to the official Gizmondo shop, the most happening new retailer on London's Regent Street, and means that the device is likely to be slightly more readily available.

Unfortunately, £229 for such a confused contraption seems more than a little steep and while the GPS functionality will undoubtedly lure in a few overpaid technology nuts, Tiger needs to decide on a direction and a market for the handheld rather than spreading its attention too thinly across each aspect of the Gizmondo.

But the retail plot thickens. A closer inspection of exactly where the Gizmondo will be on sale reveals that with the exception of John Lewis, only a select few stores of each chain will actually be stocking it. The Birmingham and Edinburgh branches of Gamestation are the lucky duo from the indie game chain while only a few of Manchester's 15 Carphone Warehouse stores (which still aren't actually warehouses) will carry the Gizmondo. The long and short of it is that even if you wanted to, you probably still couldn't walk into a shop and buy a Gizmondo. But hey, at least it's a start, right?

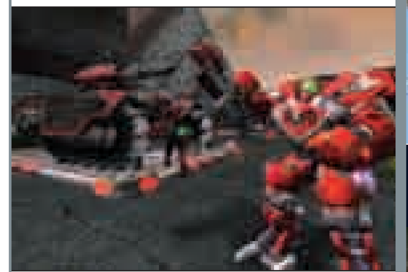
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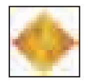
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



DEATH OF THE TRIBE

Fans of *Tribes: Vengeance* are up in arms after publisher Vivendi Universal announced that it had stopped work on a planned add-on for the game. The news appeared as a topic started by Vivendi's marketing manager Guy Welch on the official *Tribes* forum, which said that "development on the previously announced *Tribes: Vengeance 1.1* update [had] been cancelled" and that "no further updates" to the game were planned. Although no reason has been given for the cancellation, many have speculated that disappointing sales are to blame.



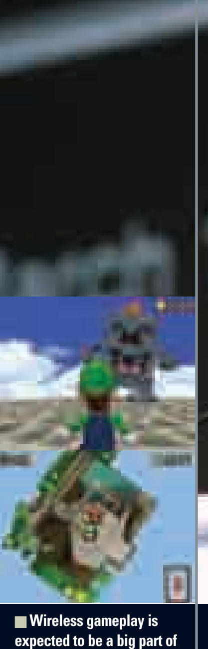


HADO, KEN

A well-deserved promotion followed by a shock demotion; Ken Kutaragi hasn't had a good time lately, but he insists his future still lies at Sony. "There's much I want to do," said Kutaragi. "I have been leading Sony Computer Entertainment and I will continue to be its leader. I will remain at Sony. It's my goal to keep moving forward." Despite being removed as the man in charge of Sony's consumer electronics and semiconductor divisions, Kutaragi remains the head of SCE and will now focus on the completion of the Cell chip, due to be ready by the end of 2005.

COME THE REVOLUTION…

NINTENDO PRESIDENT SPEAKS OUT ABOUT NEXT-GEN CONSOLE



■ Wireless gameplay is expected to be a big part of the Revolution.

It's been confirmed that development kits for the next-gen Nintendo Revolution console are ready to start doing the rounds. An interview with Nintendo president Satoru Iwata in *Business Week* magazine last month revealed that development kits for the Revolution are "already out there" and it's been promised that all the information needed to start work on titles for the machine will be available soon.

It's been made clear in various interviews that the Revolution will be sold not only on its technical ability but also largely on its innovation – something that Nintendo is now well-known for championing. Regarding this, Iwata was keen to comment on the Revolution's interface, revealing that it would allow for some brand new forms of games-playing. "We have a number of candidates for a new interface but are not ready to reveal them. All I can say right now is that whatever we choose will be intuitive and easy to use for everyone."

He also commented on the rumours regarding the inclusion of a microphone, and stated that if a mic was to be included in the new interface it would not be a defining feature.

An area that's almost certainly looking to be overhauled is the means of control. In another interview – this time with Japanese publication *Nikkei Business* – Iwata suggested "controllers for the current consoles may satisfy the hardcore, but they've become too difficult for the casual gamers". Who knows, maybe we'll end up dragging a stylus across our TV screens.

> "CONTROLLERS FOR CURRENT CONSOLES MAY SATISFY THE HARDCORE BUT THEY'RE TOO DIFFICULT FOR CASUAL GAMERS"

He also revealed that the Revolution had received a very positive response from developers familiar with the machine. This is thought to be due to Nintendo's plans to keep development costs as low as possible by using the GameCube's software libraries and application program interfaces.

All this, along with the company's plans to make online gaming more accessible and introduce wireless LAN capability, is helping to conjure up an interesting picture of what Nintendo has planned. As it stands, most publishers are yet to declare any direct interest in Nintendo's next-gen console, but with many not yet specifying which machines their next-generation projects are targeted at, we expect announcements to be made soon – possibly around the same time as E3 where it's expected that the Revolution will be unveiled.



■ The DS has led the way in innovative control methods. Where will the Revolution go?

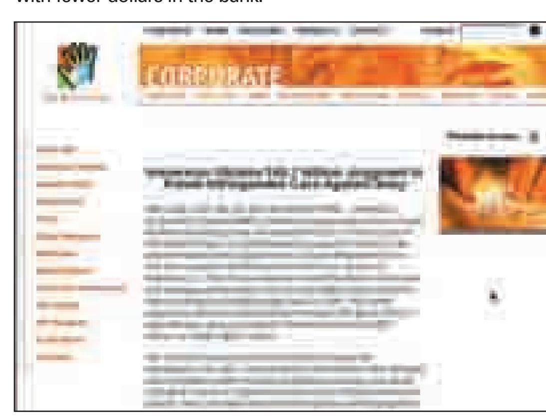
SONY TO PAY MASSIVE DAMAGES OVER CONTROLLER PATENT INFRINGEMENT

SHOCK AND LAW

A California judge has ordered Sony Computer Entertainment to cough up $90 million in damages to tech firm Immersion Corp, the company that legally owns the rights to the force feedback technology used in the Dual Shock controller. This follows last September's ruling in Immersion's favour. While Sony is set to appeal against the court's decision (although after two straight rulings against it, this seems unlikely to pay off), it will still need to pay a compulsory licence fee to Immersion if it is to continue supplying its controllers and consoles – which come bundled with a controller – to retailers.

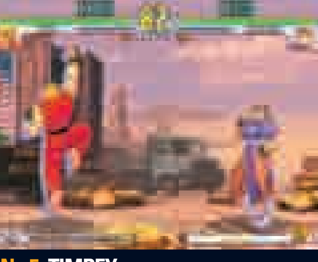
Despite threats issued against Sony to halt sales of hardware, it seems unlikely that PlayStation products will ever be removed from shelves completely. The move seems to be more scaremongering, forcing Sony to fall in line with rival Microsoft (which signed a deal with Immersion last year after being named in the original lawsuit) or face a retail crisis.

While it might be amusing to see the relatively tiny Immersion cripple one of Japan's biggest names, we get the feeling that between appeals, deals and a little business sense, it'll be business as usual for Sony in a matter of months, albeit with fewer dollars in the bank.

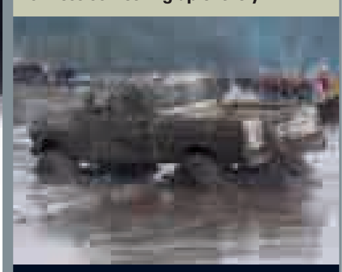


£90 million – that's a lot of cash, even for a ginormous multinational company.

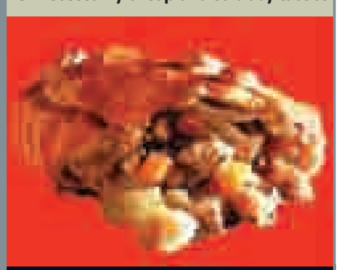
games™ THE TOP FIVE
BIZARRE GAMING EXPRESSIONS



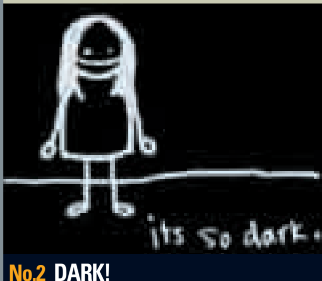
No.5 TIMPEY
To mess something up entirely



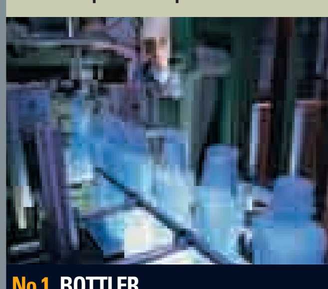
No.4 FILTHY
Unnecessarily cheap and scrubby tactics



No.3 PASTY HANDS
Things that make joypads sweaty



No.2 DARK!
An example of exceptional skill



No.1 BOTTLER
An under-performing individual

GAMES ROOM 101
THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



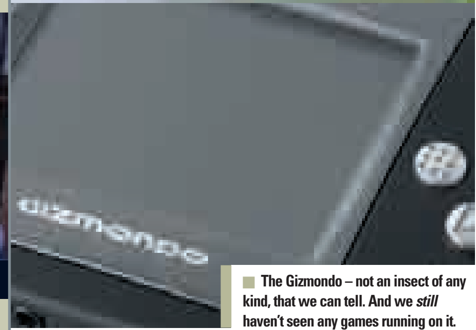
NO. 31: BEHOLD, THE BUMBLEBEE

We've ranted before about the crime of publishers advertising games without showing in-game footage (as opposed to in-game cut-scenes… shame on you, Rockstar) but recently we've been more bemused than enraged by the Gizmondo ads on prime-time television. Apparently, the bumblebee – one of the many creatures that constantly brings us aggravation during the summer months – shouldn't be able to fly. Really. It's something to do with body weight in relation to its wingspan and other physics-related tomfoolery. Fascinating stuff, we're sure you agree.

Still, one question comes to mind out of all this: what's that got to do with the Gizmondo? Besides a two-second flash at the end, the handheld is barely mentioned in the ad, while any reference to what it can actually do (and, to be fair, it can do quite a lot) or the games available is completely absent. Obviously, many of us know of the Gizmondo, but say we didn't – would this ad make us want to know more or perhaps even buy one? Not really, no. We like stylish advertising but when all it does is make a mockery of the product, well, it's hardly worth the effort, is it?



The bumblebee – a wonder of nature, apparently, although its connection to a handheld is tenuous at best.



The Gizmondo – not an insect of any kind, that we can tell. And we *still* haven't seen any games running on it.

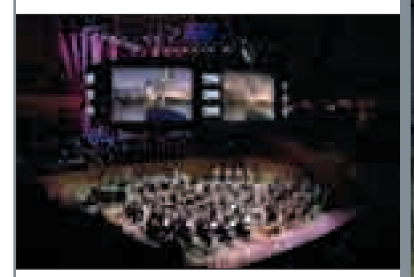
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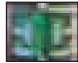
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



A FANTASY IN G-MINOR

Fans of The Black Mages, rejoice – it looks as though your favourite band, led by *Final Fantasy* composer Nobuo Uematsu, will be heading to the UK this year. Following the huge success of Uematsu's concerts in Japan and the sell-out of a similar show in San Francisco, Square Enix has confirmed that it's looking to bring the show – featuring a combination of orchestral *Final Fantasy* arrangements and Black Mages music – to our shores in the near future. An extra concert will also take place at E3.





KNIGHTS TIME

Sega's moves to re-establish itself as a leading publisher continued last month, with the company's US arm signing a deal to publish next-gen titles from Silicon Knights, although the formats this includes have yet to be announced. "Silicon Knights has a rich history of developing great games that push hardware technology, so we expect this relationship will result in a powerful, new and highly commercial franchise," said Sega of America president Simon Jeffery. Despite the developer working on a Cube title called *Too Human* that fell off the radar, Sega could not confirm if the game would reappear.

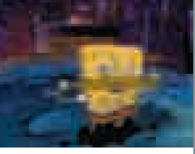


IT'S A RICH MAN'S WORLD

NEXT-GEN SOFTWARE LOOKS SET FOR A HIGHER PRICE TAG



Could *Outlaw Golf 3* set you back £60? Ouch.



How much would you be willing to pay for a bit of SpongeBob?

Some would say that the price of games is already far too high. Well, the situation could soon be getting worse, as it now looks as if gamers will be forking out even more for the titles they want when the next-generation consoles arrive.

Speaking at the Banc Of America Securities Consumer Conference last month, representatives from Take 2, Activision and THQ indicated that higher prices for software will be inevitable for the next-generation platforms. It's been stated that prices of $59.99 or more are likely for triple-A games, which is likely to translate to £59.99 in the UK. Although this jump in price is likely to be blamed on rising development costs, the proposed price hike is probably less to do with development and more down to the publishers looking to expand profit margins.

Clearly, the development costs will be undoubtedly higher than they are now, so the transition to the next-generation machines must seem like the perfect opportunity for publishers to start slapping higher price tags on their products without too many people taking umbrage. They've obviously forgotten the outrage among gamers who had to hand over £60 for their first few N64 titles.

On the plus side, this price rise will only be the case for the top titles; all publishers represented at the conference confirmed that a price hike would only happen "where appropriate" and a two-tier structure is likely to develop. This will see smaller titles and children's games being sold at around the $39.99–49.99 mark with THQ admitting that its children's titles would be unlikely to sustain a higher price than that. That's a good point, as the thought of having to hand over £60 for the next *SpongeBob* game is a scary one.

Leading US retailer Electronics Boutique, which was present at the conference, has also suggested that prices are set to rise in the coming year, but – like the publishers – it made it clear that the market would only sustain these premium prices on the triple-A titles.

> "**HIGHER DEVELOPMENT COSTS** FOR NEXT-GEN MACHINES MEAN PUBLISHERS HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SLAP **BIGGER PRICE TAGS ON THEIR GAMES**"

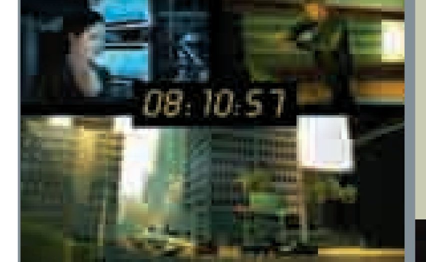


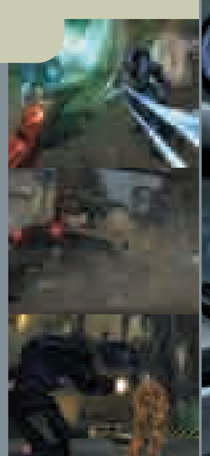
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



WORST DAY OF OUR LIVES

It was inevitable that someone would finally get around to creating a videogame version of *24* – possibly our favourite show as far as serious TV drama goes. The fact that someone has turned out to be Sony is probably a good thing, although the team responsible for the development is SCEE's Cambridge Studio, the people behind the beautiful-but-empty-gameplay efforts that were *Primal* and *GhostHunter*. On the plus side, though, the game clearly has some high production values with various members of the *24* team (including script writer Duppy Demetrius, composer Sean Callery and stars Kiefer Sutherland, Elisha Cuthbert and Carlos Bernard) all being involved. Look out for a release later in the autumn.







Not enough *Halo 2*? There's more on the way.



LIVE AND KICKING

NEW HALO MULTIPLAYER MAPS CONFIRMED

It's now been confirmed that a multiplayer expansion pack for *Halo 2* will be available in shops by the end of June. As well as containing nine brand new maps (which will include the streets of Old Mombasa and an ancient temple arena), the pack will include a short documentary and an animated single-player side story in exchange for your hard-earned £14.99.

A trip to the shops isn't the only way to get hold of these maps, however. As of April, Xbox Live subscribers will be able to download two of the maps for free, while another two will be available for a small fee. Although a UK price is yet to be set for these two maps, it looks as if US gamers will be paying about $5.99.

Of course, you could always wait until June if you want the extra features (by which time Microsoft has claimed that all the new maps will be available for free download), but that's likely to mean watching while the rest of the world (including all your friends, no doubt) enjoy the new *Halo* environments without you.

A LITTLE HELP?

GAMES INDUSTRY BODY CALLS FOR GOVERNMENT AID

Publishing body Elspa has recently announced that without additional help from the government, the videogame industry may struggle to maintain its financial health. According to figures provided by analysts Screen Digest, the game industry made a contribution in the realm of £200 million to the UK economy in 2003, easily beating those of the television and film industries.

However, "the years ahead look less promising" warned Elspa director general Roger Bennett. "Our greatest asset is our creativity and in recent times we have seen this talent being leached away through a lack of funding and more attractive prospects overseas." The decline in the number of UK studios is being blamed on the rising cost of development, and the situation looks likely to worsen when higher-priced next-gen software arrives. It's this that has prompted Bennett to ask the government for assistance.

"It is now time for the government to recognise the valuable contribution we make to the UK economy," he said. "It needs to give the games industry the same level of support provided to the film industry." It's a nice thought, but we worry that his plea may fall on deaf ears.

> "OUR GREATEST ASSET IS OUR CREATIVITY AND WE HAVE SEEN THIS TALENT BEING LOST THROUGH A LACK OF FUNDING"

"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH Unreal's Mark Rein crams into a nutshell everything that's wrong with the industry today

"People are such snobs with this 'It's not about graphics' thing. That's nonsense – it's totally about graphics. What's the difference between the first *Metal Gear Solid* and the latest one? It's the graphics!"

games™ says: And there we were, wondering why originality is dead. If people in the industry think this way, no wonder it's all going wrong…

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!

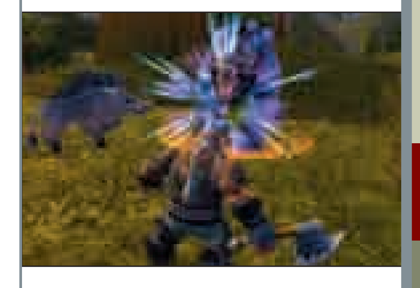
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



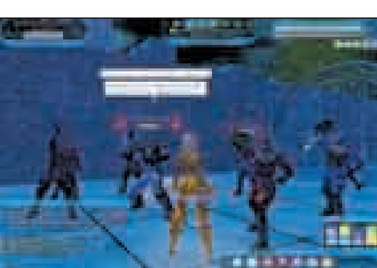
EVERYONE LOVES WARCRAFT

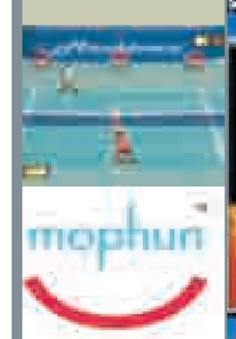
World Of Warcraft's success has reached record levels, with over 1.5 million people worldwide subscribing to the game. "From region to region, we've seen a phenomenal level of enthusiasm for *WoW*, and we're absolutely thrilled people are enjoying the game so much," said Blizzard president Mike Morhaime. Unfortunately, such success has led to shortages of the game, while Blizzard has been forced to restrict the number of copies sent to shops in order to prevent the servers overloading. A relaunch of the game is due soon to satisfy demand.



SUPERHERO SQUABBLES

The fight for superhero supremacy continues, with both Marvel and NCSoft claiming early victory in their legal battle over copyright issues regarding *City Of Heroes*. With some of Marvel's claims labelled "false and sham" by Judge R. Gary Klausner, NCSoft declared a moral victory. However, Marvel says its case is strong, despite focusing on NCSoft rather than game users who create copycat characters. "We have not and will not sue customers of *City Of Heroes*," said Marvel vice president John Turtizin.







REAL-TIME MULTIPLAYER GAMES ARRIVING COURTESY OF SYNERGENIX

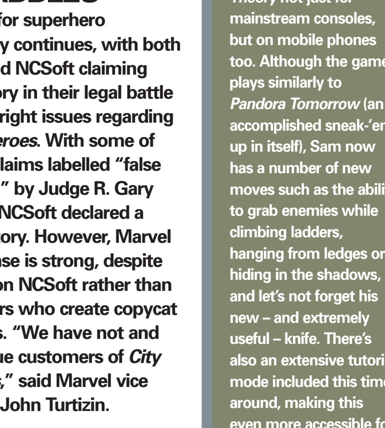
MY MATE, MOBILE MATE

Mobile phone gamers can soon look forward to a wider variety of games and the introduction of real-time multiplayer gaming across the 3 network. This is thanks to a deal signed between the UK network provider and Synergenix Interactive, the creator of Mophun – a development tool that's bidding to become the RenderWare of mobile phone development.

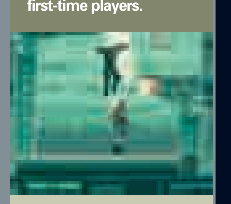
The deal, signed late last month, allows 3 to distribute a number of Synergenix-developed Mophun titles such as *Rally Pro Contest* and *Lock 'N' Load*, as well as a wide variety of more conventional Java-based games. Both companies are aiming to introduce genuine real-time multiplayer titles – something currently unseen in mobile gaming – across the network in the near future. No prices have been confirmed, but it is expected that 3 will maintain its current charges of between £3 and £7.50 per title.

"The combination of Mophun 3D games and multiplayer is a real differentiator which shows the full potential of 3's video mobile network and advanced handsets," said Martin Forsling, CEO of Synergenix. "By co-operating with world-leading publishers, Synergenix aims to establish Mophun as the leading mobile games middleware. We believe this agreement with 3 builds on Synergenix's leading position in the mobile phone industry."

Mobile Game Of The Month



The multiformat exploits of Sam Fisher continue with the release of *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* not just for mainstream consoles, but on mobile phones too. Although the game plays similarly to *Pandora Tomorrow* (an accomplished sneak-'em-up in itself), Sam now has a number of new moves such as the ability to grab enemies while climbing ladders, hanging from ledges or hiding in the shadows, and let's not forget his new – and extremely useful – knife. There's also an extensive tutorial mode included this time around, making this even more accessible for first-time players.



GAMELOFT BRINGS URBZ-A-LIKE TO MOBILES

BIG APPLE, LITTLE PHONE

***The Sims* might be hugely popular, but it's not the easiest style of game to whittle down onto a mobile phone – EA tried it with *The Urbz* on the N-Gage, but failed miserably.** Hopefully, Gameloft will have more luck with *New York Nights*, its new title that attempts to recreate the life of a busy New Yorker for those who aren't lucky enough to live in the Big Apple.

Breaking down the *Sims* concept into its most simple parts, *New York Nights* gives players the challenge of conquering the city in just 40 days (on an in-game clock, as opposed to real time). Doing this costs money, which means you have to find various jobs to do in the form of mini-games that reward you with cash. As well as this you need to make friends with as many people as possible.

New York Nights will be released for many types of phone, and Gameloft is hoping that it will prove popular with a range of gamers.




eMag

LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"JUST WHEN I THINK I'VE GOT THE YANKS PEGGED THEY THROW ME OUT WHY THEY LIKE WATERY BEER, BUT I'VE NEVER FIGURED OUT WHY

Having greedily overindulged in the latest batch of console releases, to the point of nauseous saturation, I invite myself over to a friend's house to plunder his cache. He always has some weird stuff as he doesn't seem to 'see' graphics the same way as the rest of us, which is to say in his eyes, games don't age. When I get there, he says, "What do you want to play?". I should've known something was up when we headed toward the PC. Just when I think I've got the Yanks pegged, they throw me another curve ball. I understand why they like watery beer made with corn instead of barley (it's because Euro beer costs more, and the TV says Budweiser is the King of Beers); I've uncovered why they drive SUVs the size of tanks (gas is cheap, so you just can); but then I've never figured out pro wrestling or why many Americans are so shouty.

Just as I'm about to say, "*Battlefield Vietnam*, actually!" my friend selects a box from the shelf and holds it in front of my eyes. "I've been getting back into this one recently," he says, in a tone of voice which suggests this will be the game we will play. The box is a CD case with no artwork, just a screen-printed disc that says *Armored Fist 3* on it using the kind of chunky iron and rivets logotype you would use to label a product '*Armored Fist 3*'. It sounds exciting and Japanese. It is, I soon learn, neither.



Tanks – ideal for when real-life conflicts need a touch of *Robot Wars*.

Armored Fist 3 is a tank game. Even in my Amiga years, having sampled *M1 Tank Platoon*, I had no time for tank games. And on the Amiga I had plenty of time for endlessly flying a little white triangle against the forces of gravity, just to put things in perspective. So up comes *AF3*. We're in the desert, which is where tank battles happen. There's lots of audible military radio chatter, which seems realistic, but I notice everyone in the entire war is in tanks, which does not. No soldiers or Humvees or troop carriers or anything but tanks, dozens of them.

We set off on a tan, blocky landscape in this special middle eastern war of only tanks. I find it impossible to date the game – it's definitely old, but not really, really old. It uses the kinds of idealistic techniques long abandoned, the ones that, on paper, everyone thought would provide the most realistic experience possible, but in practice provided the opposite. The view from inside the tank, for example, uses a static photograph from inside a real tank, with live elements such as a window to the game world and flashing instrument lights placed on top. This looks wrong because it's a still, 2D photo in a world of moving, 3D, computery blobs. Each explosion on the barren terrain is actually



ANOTHER CURVE BALL. I'VE WORKED MANY AMERICANS ARE SO SHOUTY"

a grubby little film clip of a real explosion, cut out in the shape of a mushroom cloud. These reminded me of *Pitfighter*'s digitised characters – little filmed elements that should have theoretically beaten a compositional short cut right to realism but got lost as an inevitable side-effect of their journey and arrived, unmistakeably, at inelegance.

But what really gets between my toes is how the game is played. My friend, who is happy as a pig in shit, keeps stabbing a button, tap-tap-tap, a few times every second, while driving around. I ask what he's doing, and he explains that pressing this button searches the landscape and aims at any enemies. All the player does is hit fire. Can you aim by yourself, I wonder? "But, see, I don't have to!" he says gleefully, "I just keep hitting the Enter button like this and it does it for me!"

It was immediately apparent that I knew exactly as much as I'd known when I landed here three years ago. I don't understand wanting to win so much that you sacrifice interaction. I don't understand getting away with doing as little as possible in a videogame. But I do think this mindset is responsible for such evils as slackened difficulty in US games, as well as publishers releasing cheats for infinite resources only days after a game's launch. And I weep.

Many thanks



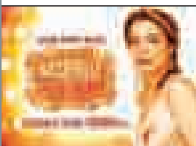
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Comic Relief



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Nashville Star 2

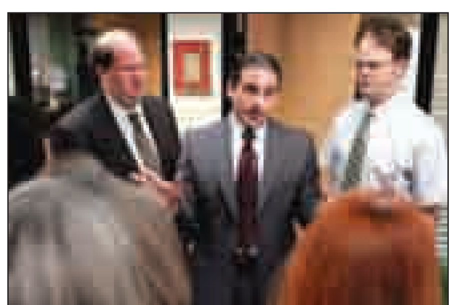


GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

THE OFFICE

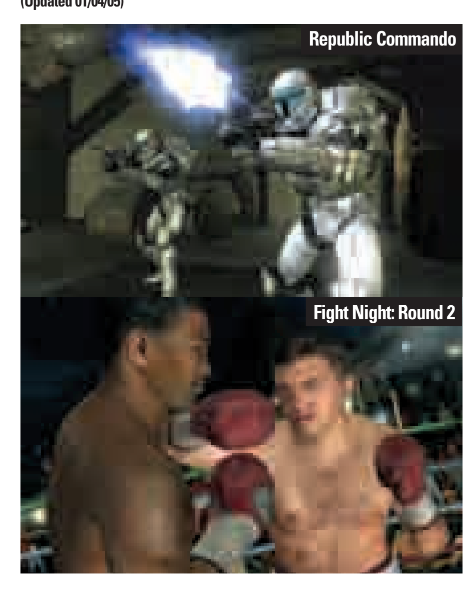


The British version of *The Office* did well on BBC America. However, seeking a wider audience, NBC has remade the show with American actors. They have, of course, missed the point, bypassing the crucially dry delivery of the British actors, thereby destroying the mockumentary platform. Sigh.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Gran Turismo 4	SCEA	PS2
2	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	PS2
3	Star Wars: Republic Commando	LucasArts	Xbox
4	Fight Night: Round 2	EA Sports	PS2
5	MX vs ATV Unleashed	THQ	PS2
6	NBA Street V3	EA Sports BIG	PS2
7	Mercenaries	LucasArts	PS2
8	Robots	Vivendi	PS2
9	Mercenaries	LucasArts	Xbox
10	Need For Speed Underground 2	Konami	PS2

(Updated 01/04/05)



Republic Commando

Fight Night: Round 2



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"'THEY'RE TRYING TO EXPOSE AMERICANS TO JAPANESE MUSIC 'SOME SONGS ARE FULL OF SUCH IDIOTIC EXUBERANCE

Donkey Konga 3 – the choice of camp novelty singers the world over.

This time last year, I wrote a column that perplexed people because it didn't arrive at a resolution. This year, I do the same thing: I write an equally perplexing column about what is, pretty much, the same game – *Donkey Konga 3*. *Donkey Konga 3* is largely the same as *Donkey Konga 2*, except it has a different ad campaign. Last year's showed a troupe of kids spinning around in front of the bongo controllers while things happened on-screen. This year's is a little more realistic: two girls who look like office workers stand in front of a *DK3* demo kiosk, pounding the bongos in decent rhythm. Shortly, a bald, broad-chested, grinning man in a suit comes up, hears the song and pushes his way between the girls. He pounds the drums with finesse, then strikes a pose.

We then realise that he's none other than Ken Matsudaira, openly gay Japanese star who gained fame years ago for playing the Shogun in a long-running Japanese television series, and gained more fame last year for inexplicably recording a song called *Matsuken Samba*, which is (of course) the song used in the *DK3* advert. The suit-wearing Matsudaira morphs into the glittering-kimono-and-samurai-ponytailed vision from his *Samba* music video, fireworks explode and the caption reads: "Fifty new songs, including *Matsuken Samba*!"

Matsuken Samba is interesting. The video, as I have hinted, stars Matsudaira dressed as a rhinestone samurai, dancing in a line with other similar weirdos, frighteningly lip-synching the words to the gaudy, flashy cross between Japanese pop, *Dance Dance Revolution* soundtrack centrepiece and comedy skit. The song is purposely stupid, and so is the video. Only its stupidity isn't nearly as overacted as that of Guitar Samurai, another recent comedy musician who can, quite frankly, get hit by a bus for all I care. *Matsuken Samba* at least shows musical competence, and doesn't alienate anyone who's not 'in' on the 'joke'. A friend at the record label responsible tells me that the *Matsuken Samba* video has been picked up by America's own MTV, and will be played in heavy rotation starting next month.

"Anime and manga are so popular in America that they're trying to expose Americans to Japanese music as well," he says. "There are bands here like Sambo Master that are genuine, real rock and roll, the likes of which people haven't made maybe ever, and there are songs like *Matsuken Samba*, which are just so full of idiotic exuberance that they can't fail." The Japanese TV commentators are as proud of *Matsuken Samba* as they were of Tomoyasu Hotei's *Battle Without Honor*



THESE DAYS,' MY FRIEND SAID. THEY REALLY CAN'T FAIL.'"

Or Humanity, also known as 'That song from *Kill Bill*'; they won't stop using it to dramatise the pause before each commercial break.

Says the lead singer of a girl-punk-rock band called Egypt Train: "Japanese people don't want to be Americans. We can perform American styles of music, and even write music in English, or go see Hollywood movies, or wear American bands' T-shirts; that doesn't mean we want to be American. Though if American people knew about our music, that'd totally be the coolest thing in the world."

In 1993, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* was released for the Mega Drive in Japan, several months after its American release. It was released in the US first because the Mega Drive was selling better there. As a marketing technique, the Japanese *Sonic 2* television ad was able to proclaim, "THIS GAME SOLD A MILLION COPIES IN AMERICA!! AMERICANS LOVE IT!!" I kid you not – that's an actual translation. 'Americans love it!!' indeed…

Kind regards



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON THIRTY-ONE	HAGGLING OVER FAKE LOUIS VUITTON BAGS IN KOREA
Korette, gosen en de, yasui! Honmono mitai!	This right here is only ¥5,000 – cheap! It looks real!
Ore datte konna yatsu tsukureruyo. Sanzen wa dou?	I could make one that looks like this. How's ¥3,000?
Fuzakken! Kore saikou da yo! Yonsen! Kanojo wo yorokobasete!	What?! It's good craftsmanship! Make your girlfriend happy!
Kanojo janakute aishou nandaze. Nisen go hyaku.	I ain't got a girlfriend, just hookers… ¥2,500.
Aa, … ja, urimasu. Anou-ee?? Naze oretachi Nihongo shabereruno? Koko Kankoku janai?	Uh, okay, I'll sell it. Um… wait? Why are we speaking Japanese? Isn't this Korea?

MEANWHILE IN KOREA

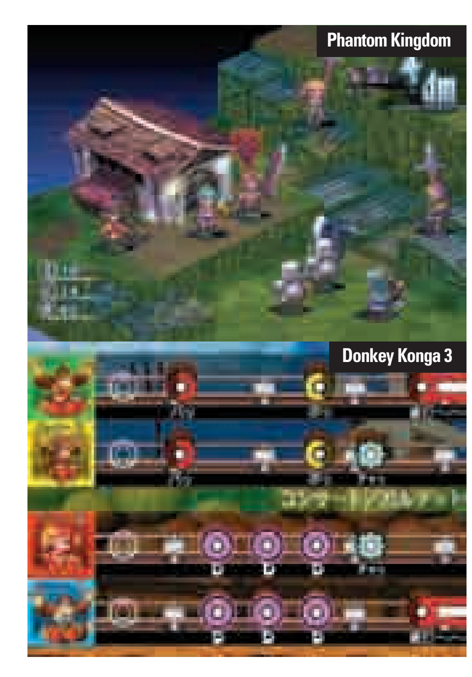
Last week, I was in Korea and I saw something interesting. A television drama series star named Bae Young-Joon is recently very popular in Japan. How he got so popular so suddenly, no-one's really sure. He's so popular that, in Dongdaemun Textile Market in Seoul, dozens of wooden street stalls were selling socks with a cartoon version of the star's face stitched into them. Japanese old ladies clawed over one another to get their hands on the socks. I stood back and waited. I eventually scored a couple of pairs of socks. I asked the vendor about them. "This market is on every Japanese tourist's travel map; these socks are selling like mad. We buy them for 200 won and sell them for 1,000. They're not even very good socks. They fall apart. They don't need to know that, though."

Beneath the portrait of Bae Young-Joon's face, in English lettering, the words 'Yon-sama' – what the Japanese call him. Said my American friend Nick, of these and other events, "I've known my [Japanese] girlfriend for, what, three years? And I told her the other day, 'We should go see some Kabuki.' And she was like, 'Kabuki?!?! I didn't know you liked Japanese theatre! I'm so proud of you!' And then there's this Korean girl in one of my English classes; her English is great. We just have general conversations – I don't really 'teach' her. I told her, 'I went to Korea last week,' and she was just like, 'Yeah, that's nice. Let's read some more *Harry Potter*'."

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Phantom Kingdom	Nippon Ichi	PS2
2	Dynasty Warriors 5	Koei	PS2
3	One Piece Grand Battle! Rush	Bandai	PS2
4	Donkey Konga 3	Nintendo	GC
5	Enthusia: Professional Racing	Konami	PS2
6	NANA	Konami	PS2
7	Bokujyo Story: Colobockle Station	Marvelous	DS
8	One Piece Grand Battle! Rush	Bandai	GC
9	Ape Escape: On The Loose	Sony	PSP
10	Tales Of Eternia	Namco	PSP

(Week ending 14/03/05 © 2005 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)


Phantom Kingdom

Donkey Konga 3

DEVELOPERS GEAR UP FOR THE NEXT GENERATION AT GDC 2005 AS SOFTWARE, HARDWARE AND MIDDLEWARE COME UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT…

California Dreaming

A cloud of anticipation hung over San Francisco's Moscone Convention Center. A war was looming, destined to be fought by the games industry's three goliaths, and the motley bunch of stragglers who marched into the Game Developers Conference knew that their task was to craft the ammunition for battle. High-tech weaponry is but a pipe dream without the equipment to create it, which is why many developers arrived at GDC 2005 with revolution in mind. Well, Nintendo Revolution, as well as Xbox 2 and PlayStation3. Although attendees were only treated to a nibble of things to come – the main course, no doubt, will be served at E3 in May – this year's conference was widely considered among the best, not only for its bombastic keynote speeches but also for some remarkable words of wisdom imparted by industry leaders.

GDC 2005 began gently with Sony's first official Walk of Game. Donkey Kong and Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto joined Atari co-founder Nolan Bushnell in receiving a giant brass plaque and a star in the floor of Sony's Metreon centre. "Thank you very much for this honour – it's always fun to be walked on," Bushnell quipped. Before we could talk *Pong* with the godfather of gaming there were less retro matters at hand, namely Microsoft's Xbox keynote address led by J Allard. The speech heralded what Allard called the 'HD era' – high-definition visuals and personalised consumer content – although it sounded suspiciously like another PR buzz-word. The thinly veiled digs at Sony were in force too, with Allard suggesting that one approach to console development was to "slap a fancy label on it" and "forget the fact that it's hard to programme for". Miaow… But behind the usual Microsoft bravado lay some intriguing titbits about Xbox 2's online services. Cashing in on burgeoning online world economies, the new Live system will allow gamers to buy virtual game assets such as characters or property for a price. Players will be able to customise their own music for every next-gen Xbox title and browse new game levels, weapons, vehicles, maps and other community goodies. Gamer Cards will allow you to connect to other Live players with similar skills and interests.

Adding weight to Microsoft's next-gen hardware, *Titanic* director James Cameron appeared on video to embrace the HD era, which fuelled rumours that his next film (anime adaptation *Battle Angel*) is under development as an Xbox 2 title. To close the show, Allard held an 'impromptu' pre-rendered race featuring the *Forza Motorsports* graphics engine. If the winning car matched the ticket you were handed upon entry, you won a Samsung HDTV. A thousand grinning winners walked away feeling a little more affection for Bill Gates.

Next stop: Nintendo. Microsoft was unable to buy our devotion with gifts but could Nintendo president Satoru Iwata woo us? While he won the audience over with tales of his early days as a developer on the *Kirby* games, his meaty keynote speech provided a much clearer vision of the future. After bigging up the 4 million DS systems shipped to Japan and North America, Iwata revealed some new titles for the DS: *Nintendogs*, a Tamagotchi-style sim with touch and microphone pooch training; and *Electroplankton*, a bonkers ▷


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California Dreaming



"SOME OF THE OLD GAMES LIKE MONKEY ISLAND **HAD TERRIFIC HUMOUR** IN THEM. WHERE'S THAT GONE?"
JOSH RESNICK, PRESIDENT, PANDEMIC STUDIOS





underwater music creator, whose improv call-and-response of "Who's your daddy?" "Nintendo!" had the audience in stitches. Both games are testament to Nintendo's new strategy of attracting non-gamers into the market; a risky gamble, but one that might pay off considering the success of the DS to date.

Gamers and non-gamers alike couldn't help but be blown away by the footage of *Legend Of Zelda*. Horse- and bull riding, one-eyed spiders, sword-swinging skeletons… it was all here in colourful *Zelda* glory. If that wasn't enough graphical food for thought, Iwata began to talk Revolution. Nintendo's next-gen console will be Wi-Fi compatible and built upon an IBM chip and an ATI graphics chip. Global Wi-Fi protocol is also on course for DS and we were treated to a snippet from a new multiplayer *Animal Crossing* for the handheld. "Each one of us has the heart of a gamer – I have the heart of the gamer," announced Iwata, and the audience seemed to agree, flocking for his autograph at the end of the event.

Sony took a back seat to the grand parading of its rivals, preferring instead to talk tech about the Cell chip for its PlayStation3, comprising 4GHz architecture. "The next-gen PlayStation3 architecture will impact a lot of people around here," said Jeff Grills, Sony Online Entertainment's technical director for *Star Wars Galaxies*. "It's a lot of interesting technology that doesn't look like it's going to be incredibly useable. Time will tell whether or not we can figure out how to make that platform perform well." Of more interest was Unreal Engine 3, which purports to take full advantage of the next-gen platforms and then some. Epic's streamlined engine is set to make level loading obsolete and threatens to give Havok a run for its money with its built-in physics engine. Demo footage of the engine – featuring a stunning, crowded cityscape alongside the glistening waters of a bay – suggests that the next generation of consoles will be populated with vast *GTA*-type worlds.

The most fun at GDC 2005 was had at the seminars. "Iwata has the heart of a gamer? My question is, what poor bastard's chest did he carve it from, and how often do they perform human sacrifices at Nintendo HQ?" A grimly pessimistic indie developer, Greg Costikyan, shattered all our conceptions about the Nintendo keynote with one sentence. Because of the financial risks involved in developing a game, innovation was dead, said Costikyan. It was an opinion echoed by *Deus Ex* creator Warren Spector at a seminar about stories in games: "The decision makers who affect this industry do not allow you to say the word 'story'. The perception is that story scares gamers… There's a great deal of commercial pressure not to take any unnecessary risks." Between rants, Spector remained tight-lipped about his next-gen project at new studio Junction Point.

But one developer was brimming with optimism. *Sims* creator Will Wright previewed a remarkable work in progress called *Spore*, displaying his belief that customisation is key to the future. Players begin with a microscopic ocean

Girl power

The lack of female developers was the focus of a number of seminars at GDC 2005. "There simply aren't that many games that women enjoy," said Michelle Sorger of Girls In Games, a non-profit organisation that encourages women in the industry. "The cost of making games is rising, as are revenues, but revenues and costs may end up cancelling each other out if developers and publishers don't seek new markets. Women are surely an ideal market. Also, it's pretty clear where the industry stands – the half-naked women at promotional booths are indication enough." All this amounts to women making up less than 10 per cent of the games industry, reckons Sorger. At her GDC seminar, Attracting Women Into Game Development, a number of female employees from various studios suggested ways to buck the trend, but the voices of men in another session consistently drowned them out. The irony was not lost.

creature and tweak their plankton until it grows legs and eventually walks onto land. Through further godly decisions the character evolves, forms societies, populates the planet, then builds a spaceship and travels the galaxy. The breadth of Wright's creation was breathtaking. *Black & White* creator Peter Molyneux later faced off Wright at the 2005 Game Design Challenge. The challenge? Create a game using a licence of uber-gloomy American poet Emily Dickinson. Wright's idea – *USB Dickinson* (in which the AI poet communicates with the player via a USB attachment) – took first prize.

Which left us at the door of the GDC 2005 Awards. Grand prizes for the Independent event went to Chronic Logic's *Gish* and Reflexive Entertainment's *Wik*. "*Gish* won because the physics-based platforming action was both retro cool and technologically up to date," said Independent Games Festival co-chairman Simon Carless. "*Wik* won because its simple all-mouse control scheme works great, and swinging around by your tongue and grabbing flies is super-addictive." Does he think indie games finally finding a market of their own? "I think so, primarily because creators can now offer games directly from their websites and people are more willing to pay to download a game. The indie game scene is starting to become financially viable as a medium." The mighty *Half-Life 2* cleaned up at the Game Developers Choice Awards, Valve's team walking off with Best Writing, Best Game and Best Technology statues. Meanwhile, Rockstar was reportedly so peeved by the snubbing of *San Andreas* that the team walked from the room.

On the surface, GDC 2005 may not have seemed like the most revelatory event – a lot from Nintendo, a little from Microsoft and not much from Sony – but at the heart of the event an army of developers were readying themselves for the next generation. From the creativity and talent we saw on display in San Francisco, the next-gen showdown should be a joy to behold.

Devil in disguise

Everyone's talking middleware these days. Now online middleware firm DemonWare is signing up with next-gen platforms and developers. Its matchmaking wares supposedly bolster in-game communities, telling you what games your friends are playing, providing gamer feedback and replays, and allowing developers to distribute their content in virtually any manner they desire. And as more of us dip into online multiplayer gaming, every bit of help streamlining is a boon. "The first title that ships with our tech comes out in May," said Dylan Collins, DemonWare CEO. And that title is *Stacked*, a console and PC poker game.



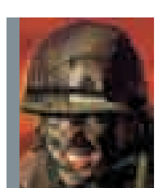
"THE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE BEEN **TOUGH FOR THE UK INDUSTRY.** NOW IS A REAL VIBRANT TIME BECAUSE NEW PLATFORMS ARE COMING OUT AND **PUBLISHERS ARE KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON INDEPENDENTS** LIKE OURSELVES"

KARL JEFFERY, CEO, CLIMAX



THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF TOMORROW



Online gaming – once the realm of the geek with the monster PC and phone bill to match – is now the fastest growing sector of the games industry. A sector so important to the future of the business that even the console manufacturers, who previously considered it of no interest to their players, are now moving heaven and earth to embrace and exploit it.

Parents' concerns about their offspring spending every evening and weekend locked in their bedrooms have been replaced by the knowledge that the broadband link and online games are now the hub of a new breed of social circles that are no longer restricted by location. Gamers have friends all over the world.

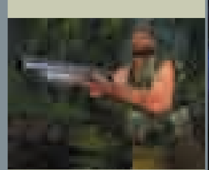
From the player's point of view, online gaming is the ultimate gaming experience. There's very little that can match an online deathmatch. There is also very little that can match the addiction factor of MMORPGs – barely a week goes by where we don't hear of people getting married who met in a game, people divorcing because one half of the couple is too addicted to an online game, or, even worse, people shunning the outside world to spend all their time online.

Online gaming is no longer for the minority. With online clans and guilds replacing youth clubs and hanging out on street corners, deathmatches replacing the football kickabout, and doing online quests becoming more popular than going out with the missus, it's clear that the future of gaming and socialising lies within that box with the flashing lights that's connected to your phone socket. Don't fear it, do it. Just don't forget the real world isn't online – yet.

DOMINIC SILK
CEO, JOLT ONLINE

FROM THE FRONT

HAS EIDOS FINALLY FOUND A BUYER? THE COMPANY'S SHAREHOLDERS SEEM TO THINK SO…



The *Conflict* series is SCi's most successful to date. Who knows what it would be capable of if it seizes Eidos?

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

THE FIGHT FOR EIDOS IS ABOUT TO COME TO A CLOSE

After months of speculation, it finally looks as if struggling publisher Eidos has found a buyer. Well, two actually.

Just when it looked as if Elevation would be taking control of Eidos, SCi swooped in with a better offer and it now looks almost certain that the *Conflict* series publisher is going to take the prize.

SCi has the backing of 21.42 per cent of Eidos shareholders – far more than Elevation has managed; indeed, shareholders have threatened to remove Eidos' board of directors if it doesn't accept the SCi offer. SCi also plans to raise £60 million from stock to manage the takeover, which will allow Eidos to spend more time on its games in development and give the combined group a nice lump sum to put towards its restructuring efforts.

Elevation is certainly not going to take this lying down, though, and in a statement issued to the financial markets, former EA president and Elevation Partners boss John Riccitiello warned of the significant risks associated with the SCi bid and attempted to swing the Eidos shareholder view.

"While SCi is a successful company, it has little experience of integrating larger businesses, of running a major international videogames company or in managing significant intellectual properties," he claimed. "By contrast, [Elevation's] cash offer provides certainty for Eidos shareholders."

Also, Eidos executives are expected to question SCi's plans for the company in the event of a successful takeover, in particular the company's ability to control a publisher that has five times more staff than it's used to.

With both companies so determined to take Eidos, maybe this won't be as cut and dried as we first thought…

JUST DESSERTS?

EA PAYS THE PRICE FOR POOR-QUALITY TITLES

Electronic Arts was forced to announce a profits warning for its fourth quarter of the current financial year after sales of several key titles fell way short of the company's expectations.

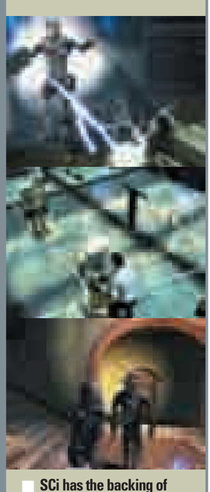
EA's projected revenue has seen a huge $200 million drop for the last three months with the company now expecting to see figures in the area of $525-550 million in sales – poor when compared to its previous estimates of $700-750 million.

"These results are clearly disappointing," said Electronic Arts chairman and CEO Larry Probst. "While our new releases are performing reasonably well, they have not been able to offset a significant fall-off in catalogue sales."

This isn't really as bad as it first sounds. If there's any company that can afford to lose the cash it's EA, and the company does expect to see a hefty revenue growth of 8-12 per cent throughout the coming year, probably thanks to the introduction of new platforms such as the PSP and Xbox 2.

Although this drop in sales is unlikely to affect the industry giant too much, it at least shows that there is a price to be paid for throwing rubbish such as *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent* at the paying public. While poor games might sell well on their release when the hype is rampant, word soon gets around when gamers have had their fingers burnt. Let's just hope the lesson is learnt.





SCi has the backing of shareholders, but Elevation Partners isn't so sure…

- 2005 (Estimate) £70 million
- 2004 £150 million
- 2003 £169 million

BASKETBALL BUCKS THE TREND AND OPTS AGAINST EXCLUSIVITY

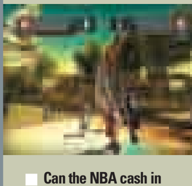
NBA GOES THE OTHER WAY

American sporting league the NBA has decided that the current trend of securing yourself to just one publisher isn't the way to go. Just months after the NFL's decision to sign exclusively to EA and Major League Baseball's similar deal with Take 2, the NBA has granted licences to EA, Atari, Sony, Take 2 and Midway.

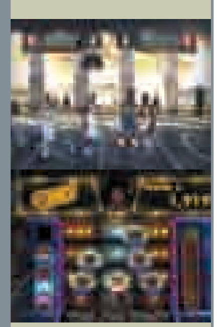
Although the NBA admits that it considered the possibility of an exclusive licence, it claims to have opted for non-exclusive licensing due to the improvements in game quality that the competition between publishers creates.

"It's been our experience that relative competition among publishers has inspired a tremendous amount of creativity," said the NBA's vice president of global merchandise, Sal LaRocca, in an interview with Reuters. "We felt that having a real diverse offering of products that runs the gamut in terms of demographic would maintain a greater share of mind, day in and day out."

Whether the NBA is really looking out for the quality of games or just figures that it could just make more money from non-exclusive deals is anyone's guess, but we'll find out when the games arrive.



Can the NBA cash in big-time by spreading its licence around?



UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	FIFA Street	EA Sports BIG	Multi
2	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	PS2
3	Brothers In Arms: Road To Hill 30	Ubisoft	Multi
4	TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	EA Games	Multi
5	Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	PS2
6	Rugby 2005	EA Sports	Multi
7	Championship Manager 5	Eidos	Multi
8	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	PS2
9	Super Mario 64 DS	Nintendo	DS
10	The Sims 2: University	EA Games	PC

Ahh, we see what you've done there. You've helped make *FIFA Street* the best-selling game just to get a rise out of us, haven't you? It's some kind of April Fool's joke, right? Right? Oh. It's not. Still, there's no accounting for taste… or the lack of it, at least.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 25 March 2005)



FIFA Street

Brothers In Arms

Devil May Cry 3

RELEASE LISTS



WipEout Pure PSP The future of handheld gaming is here.

Cold Winter PS2 Vivendi's seasonal shooter leaves us cold.

Trackmania Sunrise PC Make silly tracks, race silly tracks. Brilliant.

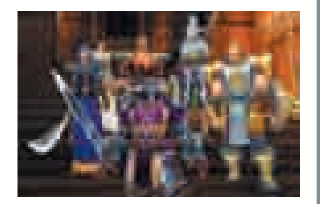


MOST PLAYED

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Format: PC
Publisher: Vivendi

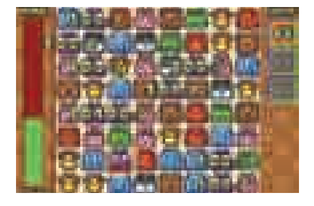
Is it wrong that we find ourselves wishing the days away, just so we can go home and pretend to be Gordax the axe-wielding Elf or Windchaser the Druid Night Elf in the evening? Not thanks to *World Of Warcraft*, it isn't – and we've barely even scratched the surface yet. Real life is so dull…



ZOO KEEPER

Format: DS
Publisher: Ignition

At last – a game that fulfils every child's non-existent dream of marshalling an avalanche of animals. Picking up *Zoo Keeper* is like brushing your stylus in glue, losing the use of most of your brain and accidentally propping your eyes open. Trust us, it's more fun than it sounds.

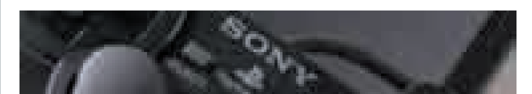


MONSTER HUNTER

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom

From humble beginnings slaying herbivores for meat to single-handedly taking down hulking Wyverns in the middle of a vast jungle, our beast-hunting career has gone from strength to strength over the last month. If Capcom plays its cards right, this could be one of the best PS2 online titles of the year…





PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '05			
22 April	Ghost In The Shell: Stand Alone Complex	Atari	
22 April	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
22 April	MX Vs ATV Unleashed	THQ	
22 April	TT Superbikes	Digital Jesters	
29 April	Haunting Ground	Capcom	Wanted
29 April	Kessen III	Koei	
29 April	Predator: Concrete Jungle	Vivendi	
29 April	Spy Vs Spy	Take 2	
29 April	Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	Atari	
MAY '05			
05 May	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith	Activision	
06 May	Street Racing Syndicate	Codemasters	
13 May	Juiced	THQ	
20 May	Area 51	Midway	
20 May	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
27 May	Alien Hominid	Zoo Digital	Wanted
27 May	Monster Hunter	Capcom	Wanted
JUNE '05			
03 June	SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	
10 June	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	Electronic Arts	
10 June	Rainbow Six 4: Lockdown	Ubisoft	
24 June	Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder	Empire	
24 June	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
24 June	Madagascar	Activision	
24 June	Fantastic Four	Activision	
24 June	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	Take 2	
Q2 '05			
TBC	God Of War	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5	Koei	
TBC	Cold Winter	Vivendi	
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Killer 7	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Kingdom Hearts 2	Buena Vista	Wanted
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	
TBC	Okami	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Sniper Elite	MC2	Wanted
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Batman Begins	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Phantom Kingdom	Koei	Wanted
TBC	Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	Wanted
TBC	LA Rush	Midway	
TBC	Spartan: Total Warrior	Sega	Wanted
TBC	Final Fantasy XII	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Sega Classics Collection	Sega	



GAMECUBE

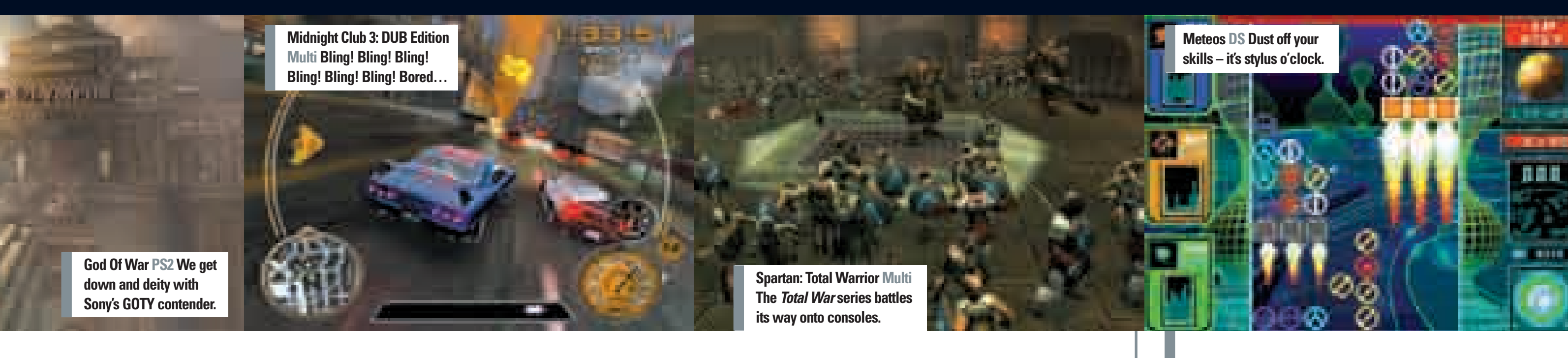
Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '05			
29 April	Star Fox: Assault	Nintendo	
MAY '05			
05 May	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith	Activision	
06 May	Street Racing Syndicate	Codemasters	
JUNE '05			
03 June	Donkey Konga 2: Hit Song Parade	Nintendo	
10 June	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	Electronic Arts	
24 June	Killer 7	Capcom	Wanted
24 June	Madagascar	Activision	
24 June	Fantastic Four	Activision	
24 June	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	Take 2	
Q2 '05			
TBC	Odama	Nintendo	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Advance Wars: Under Fire	Nintendo	
TBC	The Legend Of Zelda	Nintendo	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '05			
22 April	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
22 April	MX Vs ATV Unleashed	THQ	
29 April	Close Combat: First To Fight	Take 2	
29 April	Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	
29 April	Spy Vs Spy	Take 2	
MAY '05			
05 May	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith	Activision	
06 May	Pariah	Hip Interactive	
06 May	Street Racing Syndicate	Codemasters	
06 May	Tenchu: Fatal Shadows	Sega	
13 May	Juiced	THQ	
20 May	Area 51	Midway	
20 May	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	Novalogic	
20 May	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
20 May	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Wanted
27 May	Worms 4: Mayhem	Codemasters	
27 May	Alien Hominid	Zoo Digital	Wanted
JUNE '05			
03 June	Capcom Fighting Jam	Capcom	
10 June	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Wanted
10 June	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	Electronic Arts	
10 June	MotoGP 3: Ultimate Racing Technology	THQ	
10 June	Rainbow Six 4: Lockdown	Ubisoft	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



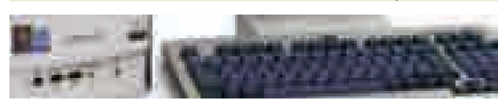
God Of War PS2 We get down and deity with Sony's GOTY contender.

Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Multi Bling! Bling! Bling! Bling! Bling! Bling! Bored…

Spartan: Total Warrior Multi The *Total War* series battles its way onto consoles.

Meteos DS Dust off your skills – it's stylus o'clock.

24 June	Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder	Empire	
24 June	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
24 June	Madagascar	Activision	
24 June	Fantastic Four	Activision	
24 June	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	Take 2	
Q2 '05			
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	Doom 3	Activision	
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	Conker: Live And Reloaded	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Jade Empire	Microsoft	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Sniper Elite	MC2	Wanted
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Batman Begins	Electronic Arts	
TBC	LA Rush	Midway	
TBC	Timeshift	Atari	
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '05			
22 April	Dungeon Lords	Dreamcatcher	
22 April	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
29 April	Close Combat: First To Fight	Take 2	
29 April	Guild Wars	NCSoft	
29 April	Imperial Glory	Eidos	
29 April	Empire Earth II	Vivendi	
29 April	The Bard's Tale	Ubi Soft	
29 April	X2: The Return	Koch Media	
MAY '05			
05 May	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith	Activision	
06 May	Asheron's Call 2: Legions	Codemasters	
20 May	Area 51	Midway	
20 May	Boiling Point: Road To Hell	Atari	Wanted
20 May	Singles 2: Triple Trouble	Koch Media	
JUNE '05			
10 June	Codename Panzers: Phase Two	Koch Media	
10 June	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Wanted
24 June	Madagascar	Activision	
24 June	Fantastic Four	Activision	
24 June	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	Take 2	
Q2 '05			
TBC	Bet On Soldier	Digital Jesters	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl	THQ	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Timeshift	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Black & While 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Sniper Elite	MC2	Wanted
TBC	Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Rise And Fall: Civilizations At War	Midway	Wanted

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '05			
22 April	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
22 April	Yoshi's Universal Gravitation	Nintendo	
29 April	Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	Konami	
MAY '05			
05 May	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith	Activision	
06 May	Kingdom Hearts: Chain Of Memories	Buena Vista	
JUNE '05			
03 June	WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	
10 June	Mega Man Battle Network 5	Capcom	
24 June	Madagascar	Activision	
24 June	Fantastic Four	Activision	
Q2 '05			
TBC	Elf: The Movie	TBC	
TBC	Mario Party Advance	Nintendo	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q2 '05			
TBC	WipEout Pure	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Smartbomb	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	World Tour Soccer	Sony	
TBC	NFL Street 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Ridge Racers	Sony	Wanted
TBC	NBA Street	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Ape Escape: On The Loose	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Untold Legends: Brotherhood Of The Blade	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Dynasty Warriors	Koei	
TBC	Twisted Metal: Head-On	Sony	
TBC	Lumines	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Metal Gear Ac!d	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Need For Speed Underground Rivals	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Tiger Woods 2005	Electronic Arts	

NINTENDO DS

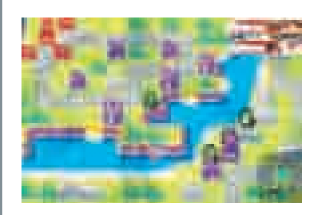
Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '05			
06 May	Yoshi Touch & Go	Nintendo	
27 May	Need For Speed Underground 2	Electronic Arts	
JUNE '05			
TBC	Pac Pix	Nintendo	
Q2 '05			
TBC	Meteos	Ubisoft	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Advance Wars DS	Nintendo	Wanted

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.

games™ ON THE HORIZON

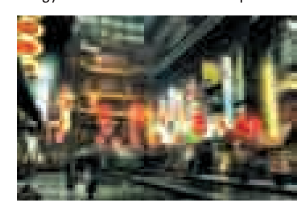
ADVANCE WARS DS

Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo
With the release date pulled forward to June in Japan, we'll be getting our hands on Intelligent Systems' next strategic title sooner than expected. The grid-based mechanics lend themselves perfectly to stylus control and this could be one of the first games that doesn't feel shoehorned into the DS's 'innovative' control scheme.



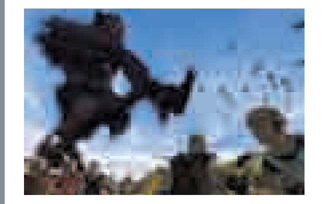
THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: Atari
"Just run it – it's *The Matrix*, man!" was the line from Atari's PR when we tried to get a few screenshots… Putting the player in the shoes of Keanu's character, *Path Of Neo* will recreate moments from the film trilogy. *Enter The Matrix 2*? We hope not.



BLACK & WHITE 2

Format: PC
Publisher: Electronic Arts
We'll admit to being underwhelmed by the first *Black & White* but Mr Molyneux seems confident that this sequel will surpass it in every way, sapping hours of the player's life without them even realising. But it's probably just going to be *Populous* again and he's hoping no-one will notice. Sorry, Pete – couldn't resist.




1900
19:26



The rope in gym class was never this much fun **Pitfall – Atari 2600 [Activision] 1982**





SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR

THE GREEKS COME BEARING MORE THAN JUST GIFTS

PS2 **Keeping secrets is incredibly difficult when what you've been asked to hide is something that many people would love to know about.** Still, we managed to keep very quiet when Sega came a-knocking, talking about its upcoming agreements with The Creative Assembly – a developer with a well-founded reputation for quality and enormous scale when it comes to its games. We kept schtum once we discovered exactly what was coming, then waited patiently after Sega's official announcement got everyone excited. We even bit our tongues when various internet forums exploded with speculation over how a solid RTS like *Total War* would do wonders for the console market, that a machine like the PlayStation2 wouldn't nearly begin to do the series justice and that Sega's acquisition of Creative Assembly would lead down a very dark and disappointing path. So much speculation… such little fact. Infuriating isn't the word, especially when you've been sworn to secrecy.

"YOU MAY HAVE TO BATTLE HUNDREDS OF FOES, BUT THIS IS FAR FROM THE HACK-AND-SLASH TITLE THAT FIRST IMPRESSIONS SUGGEST IT IS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: The Creative Assembly
RELEASE: Sept '05
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

HISTORY

Although *Spartan* has a style similar to the *Total War* series, Creative Assembly is keen to stress that it's a completely different game.

CONCEPT

The *Total Warrior* IP combines the epic battles of *Total War* with the focus of *Dynasty Warriors* and an emphasis on tactical combat.



Anyone caught in the Medusa beam gets turned to stone. Best stay clear…

Thankfully, the truth of the matter is rather more positive than the doom and gloom already predicted – not just for gamers, but for developer and publisher alike as well. At the centre of it all is *Spartan: Total Warrior*, Creative Assembly's current work in progress that's already well on the way to meeting its September release date; that's hardly a difficult feat if the game was based on a revised version of the already accomplished *Total War* engine, but it's not. Instead, *Total Warrior* represents a new direction for the developer that it's hoping will help introduce a whole new audience to the concept of epic combat, not to mention another well-kept secret that it has managed to keep under wraps for a long time.

"The *Total Warrior* engine has been in secret development for over two and a half years and has been designed with the specific objective of being able to enable this unique gameplay experience," says Ian Roxburgh, studio marketing manager at Creative Assembly. "We've had to push the consoles to their absolute limits in order to be able to depict such huge battles in such vast and detailed environments and it wouldn't have been possible to do this without developing our own technology."

While the mention of huge-scale battles and detailed landscapes might bring memories of the *Total War* series flooding back, fans of Creative Assembly's past works (and, indeed, those who've never sampled them) should know that *Spartan* sets out to bring the player closer to the action than ever before. The clue is in the name – rather than controlling the war through the commanding of troops, you now have direct control over a single warrior, including all his attacks and movement. But that's not to say that Creative Assembly is compromising when it comes to the scale of the battles or the high level of detail in the landscape; seeing hundreds of men fighting and killing each other around you is still to be expected, while the freedom of movement and complete lack of fogging means you can see and explore every inch of the levels around you, all at a smooth 60 frames per second. Before you say *Dynasty Warriors*, though, don't – *Spartan* may take elements of Koei's vaunted franchise, but Creative Assembly's effort has the edge as far as sheer numbers are concerned.

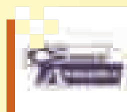
> "WITH SPARTAN, THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY HAS DEVELOPED A TITLE THAT HAS NEVER BEEN TECHNICALLY ACCOMPLISHED ON THIS GENERATION OF HARDWARE"
> SCOTT STEINBERG, VP MARKETING, SEGA AMERICA

"*Spartan: Total Warrior* is a unique gameplay experience and really has very little in common with the *Dynasty Warriors* series," insists Roxburgh. "Although that series purports to depict huge battles, there are only ever 30 or so troops on screen at any one time and a very short fogging distance. The custom-designed *Total Warrior* engine enables so much more; we can have up to 180 troops on screen at once and a draw distance of three kilometres. This means players will genuinely be at the heart of huge battles."

Although the game spans three massive chapters (seeing your character rise up from a lowly soldier to a Greek hero, before venturing across the land, from

FACT VERSUS FICTION

In direct contrast to The Creative Assembly's previous efforts with the *Total War* series and its *Time Commanders* television show, *Spartan* takes more than a few liberties with Greek history in order to spice up the action a little. Some elements are pure fiction for the period (such as the machine-gun-style ballista weapons) while others are grounded in the mythology of gods and monsters, with many familiar faces making an appearance; a battle with the Minotaur in a huge pillar-filled hall reminiscent of the Balrog fight in *Lord Of The Rings*, or the huge bronze statue of Talos from *Jason And The Argonauts* stand out as particularly strong examples. "*Spartan: Total Warrior* isn't historically accurate at all and was never intended to be," admits Ian Roxburgh. "We draw from the whole of Ancient Greek mythology and, of course, the Roman period, but we've hand-picked the bits that we believe will add most to the fun and the gameplay."



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Originally focusing on producing conversions of titles for various publishers (including EA and Psygnosis) when it was founded in 1987, The Creative Assembly has since become a highly respected name in RTS development through the creation of the *Total War* series. *Spartan: Total Warrior* is its first title since being acquired by Sega Europe.

HISTORY

- ROME: TOTAL WAR 2004 [PC]
- MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR 2002 [PC]
- SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR 2000 [PC]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

"NO… I'M SPARTACUS!"

DYNASTY WARRIORS + GREEK MYTHOLOGY + MORE, MORE, MORE = SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR

■ *Spartan*'s environments are as varied as the enemies you'll fight.

■ The hammer – hardly the fastest weapon, but one that really hurts.

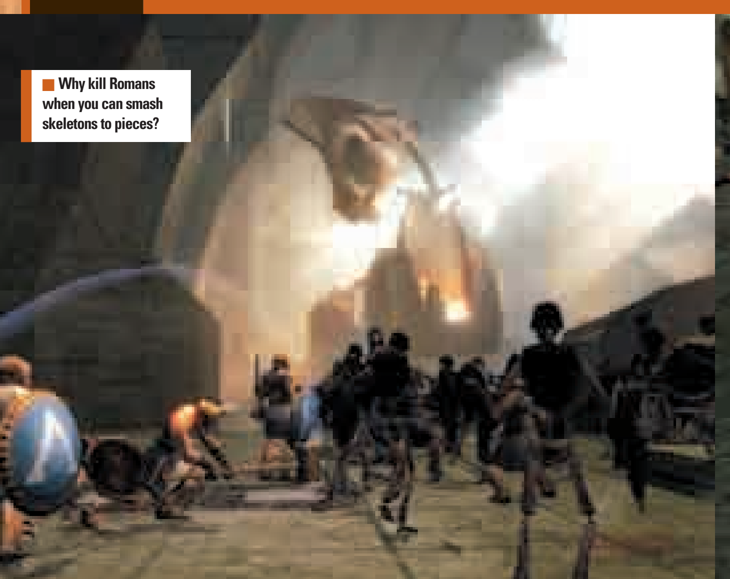
PUBLISHER PROFILE

SEGA

■ Despite being part of the Sega empire, Sega Europe is keen to stand apart from its Japanese and American brethren by building up a portfolio of titles that are distinctly different to Sega's usual output; something that is already apparent from its most recent releases and upcoming titles.

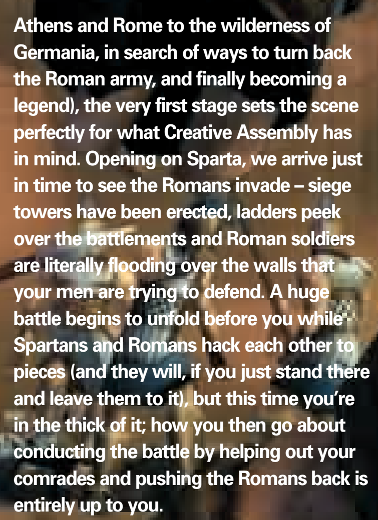
HISTORY

■ **CHILDREN OF THE NILE** 2005 [PC]
■ **WORLD SNOOKER CHAMPIONSHIP 2005** 2005 [Multi]
■ **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005** 2004 [PC]



■ Why kill Romans when you can smash skeletons to pieces?





Athens and Rome to the wilderness of Germania, in search of ways to turn back the Roman army, and finally becoming a legend), the very first stage sets the scene perfectly for what Creative Assembly has in mind. Opening on Sparta, we arrive just in time to see the Romans invade – siege towers have been erected, ladders peek over the battlements and Roman soldiers are literally flooding over the walls that your men are trying to defend. A huge battle begins to unfold before you while Spartans and Romans hack each other to pieces (and they will, if you just stand there and leave them to it), but this time you're in the thick of it; how you then go about conducting the battle by helping out your comrades and pushing the Romans back is entirely up to you.

However, it's not simply a matter of charging in, sword in hand. By applying intelligent AI, a variety of fighting techniques and an objective-based structure under the main combat, Creative Assembly has made sure that *Spartan* is far more than just a brainless slash-'em-up. "A key focus of the design from the very beginning of the project has been to ensure that a hack-and-slash approach will not work," says Roxburgh. "We describe the combat system as 'action and reaction'; it's important for the player to act and react to the shape of the battle around them. Simply wading in and bashing buttons will not work, as players will quickly be overwhelmed by the huge number of enemies and end up with their face in the dirt."

To this end, *Spartan* attempts to give players what Creative Assembly refers to as 'tactical combat', offering many different ways to approach each battle. Initially, your hero has access to a single sword that can be used for a variety of close-range melee attacks and a bow that offers alternative long-distance fighting (something that proves particularly useful when powered up with collectable items such as Fire Arrows); both of these offer attacks that can focus on an individual adversary or a wide arc of enemies depending on the move used.

However, the hero's shield also has its own range of moves that cover both offensive and defensive capabilities – it's in being able to adapt your attacking strategy to each situation that the tactical side of the action really comes into play, especially since every enemy you face has the ability to do everything to you that you can do to them. As the game progresses, you gain access to even more weapons (twin swords, spears and the cumbersome-yet-powerful hammer being examples that Creative Assembly is willing to reveal so far), as well as unique powers that allow you to strike down your foes with the might of the gods themselves.

In order to expand the action out of the hack-and-slash genre even further, *Spartan*'s mission structure means that the player always has something to work towards besides eradicating the opposition. What those objectives are depends entirely on which level you're on, but the first stage alone sees them vary from taking out key enemies and defending specialist troops to performing specific actions that, when completed correctly, can lead to more allies rallying to your cause or see the enemy driven back through use of the interactive environments. The fact that the player has to keep these objectives in mind while also trying to fend off attacks from all sides and keep their own men alive is what drives the gameplay forwards, making it something more than the other traditional 3D slash-'em-ups on the market today.

OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY

The fact that the *Total Warrior* announcement comes off the back of Sega buying out one of the most respected developers in the UK has sent a few shivers down the spines of Creative Assembly fans, but the developer is keen to allay fears of it losing its identity or original flair. "Sega has made it very clear from the beginning that it's bought the company because of our reputation for world-class, innovative games and it has no intention of changing a winning formula," says Ian Roxburgh. "This strengthens our position as a developer significantly as Sega's investment gives us the security we need to continue to develop our own technology and make innovative and creative games long into the future. I can assure you that it's business as usual as far as we're concerned."



Although there are many objectives to complete, there's still plenty of scope for slaughter.

SO… MANY… SOLDIERS

The Romans are the enemy for much of the game, but that doesn't mean you'll be facing off against the same old grunts over and over – *Spartan* offers 60 different types of opponent, with tactical combat once again coming into play when working out the best strategy to ensure their defeat. "There is a huge variety of enemies, each with their own AI and tactics," says Ian Roxburgh. "It's another important mechanism for avoiding the repetitive 'hack and slash' style of gameplay. Using the same moves and tactics against different opponents won't work. For example, the Praetorian assassins are incredibly fast and agile compared to your regular Roman soldier; any attempt to simply wade in with a standard attack will prove costly, so players will have to find new ways of dealing with these enemies – for example, kicking them off high ledges, using the bow and so on."

Unfortunately, and in typical fashion, Creative Assembly is determined to merely drip-feed details about *Spartan* until its release (only four stages of the game have been shown for now, with more to be revealed at E3). Even at this stage, though, there's no denying that the developer has done an incredible job at generating such gameplay on a console, particularly the PlayStation2; the huge amount of action on screen at any one time clearly pushes it to its limits, which would explain Sega Japan's reluctance to believe it was really running on the machine when the developer first showed it off (a story Roxburgh relates with much glee).

Looking further ahead, however, *Spartan*'s mix of fast-paced action, tactical stylings and epic scale places the groundwork for what could very well be the perfect console counterpoint to Creative Assembly's PC success – something that Sega is no doubt counting upon as much as the developer itself.

"SPARTAN IS BASED UPON DYNAMIC, EPIC ACTION AND WE COULD FIND NO BETTER PARTNER THAN SEGA, WHO WROTE THE BOOK ON CONSOLE GAMING"

TIM ANSELL, MANAGING DIRECTOR, CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

COLD WINTER

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

NOTE TO SELF: LOWER EXPECTATIONS IN FUTURE

PROJECT: SNOWBLIND – FUTURISTIC SETTING x BLUE PETER = COLD WINTER

"WE'VE TRIED TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE MORE COMMON CONVENTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS APPLIED TO THE GENRE TO BUILD A GAME THAT'S FUN"

JULIAN WIDDOWS, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, SWORDFISH STUDIOS

Munitions Crate (Locked)
Pick Lock

Get shot and all you'll see is red mist and flying flesh, making it damn hard to fight back.



COLD WINTER
PLAYSTATION2



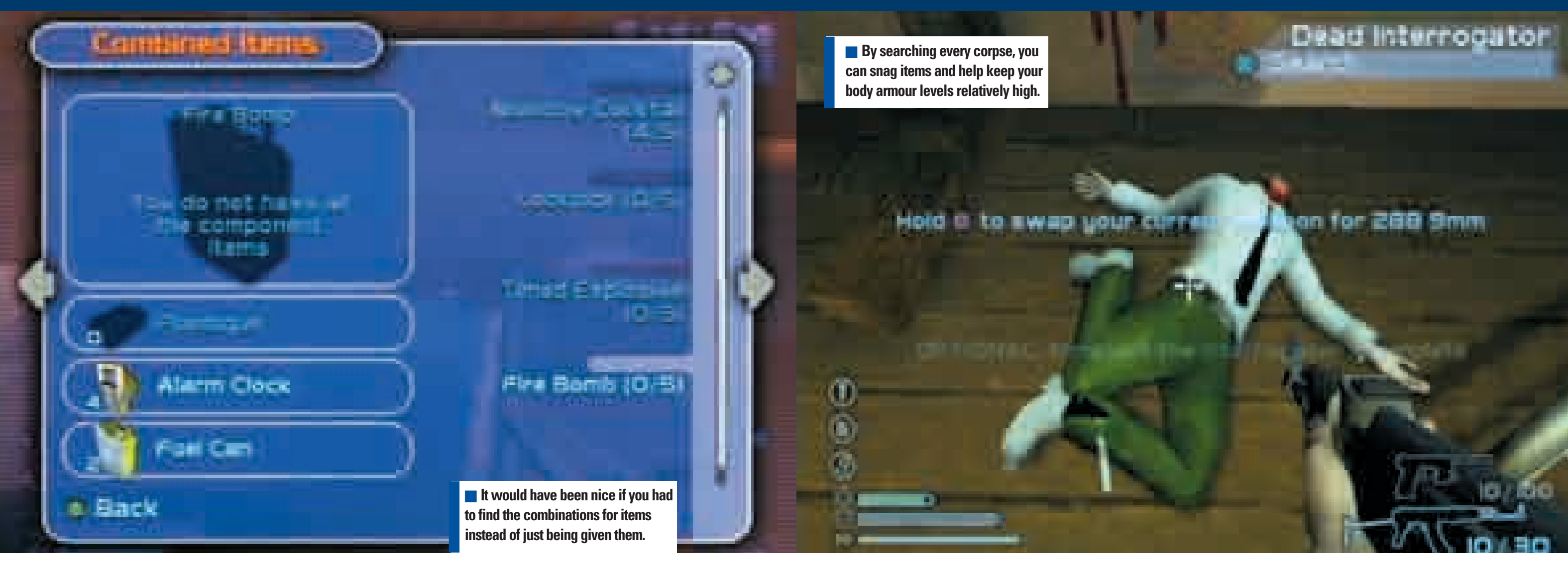
DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Swordfish's story is one of rags to riches – from nearly being dragged down with the sinking ship that was Rage to re-emerging as a standalone studio with big ideas. Many of those ideas have been sport-based, but the likes of *Hostile Waters* and *Cold Winter* prove Swordfish can handle other genres.

HISTORY

- ■ **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RUGBY** 2004 [Multi]
- ■ **HOSTILE WATERS** 2001 [PC]
- ■ **UEFA STRIKER** 2000 [PSone]





■ By searching every corpse, you can snag items and help keep your body armour levels relatively high.

■ It would have been nice if you had to find the combinations for items instead of just being given them.

MAYBE SWORDFISH SHOULD TURN THE HEATING UP

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Vivendi
DEVELOPER: Swordfish Studios
RELEASE: Q2 '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

■ An anti-terrorist tale for the now – intrigue, bloodshed and guns… lots of guns. We just wish it was as promising as we'd first thought.

PS2 **It sounds obvious, but there's a massive difference between being shown a game by a developer and being able to actually play it.** Usually, in the first instance, said developer gets to choose what it shows off and makes sure you come away with a rosy impression. Get your hands on the code, however, and you can mess around to your heart's content, picking at the game until the whole thing unravels. It's common practice, but much of the time such picking only serves to keep our simple minds amused rather than change our opinions of a game… or at least, it didn't until *Cold Winter* came along.

It only takes a look at issue 16 to see how excited we were about Swordfish Studios' attempt to enter the FPS market, and the initial signs were promising: a solid engine using some nice Karma-based physics, a decent selection of weapons, a well-constructed story and some clever ideas that put a twist on the whole genre. As we said all those months ago, "we can certainly attest to the quality that's already there and unless something goes wrong in the near future, we suspect it'll turn out to be something rather special." Um, jinx.

For one reason or another, something has gone awry with *Cold Winter* which – rather amazingly, considering how long it's been in development – is still only at the preview stage. Admittedly, it's no *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent* and there's still plenty of things that impress. The physics, for instance, still provide some nice touches, with roaring explosions sending enemies flying, and the option to move furniture around to provide cover comes in handy when the bullets really start flying. Some meaty weapons and the zone-based body damage structure also provide moments of both brutality and unintentional hilarity, as you can happily spend your time picking off random body parts of your enemies.

However, what else remains in the game at this stage of development is a far cry from what was initially promised by Swordfish. Based on those forecasts, we'd hoped for a gritty and realistic shooter with multiple paths through levels, side-missions that require as much thought as the main game and plenty of blood throughout. Instead, *Cold Winter* feels decidedly by the book; linear level design, bizarre AI that has enemies running around like crazy if they can find cover from which to shoot at you, and a script that appears to be peppered with *Getaway*-style swearing just to make it sound 'cool' ("Got you, you f**kers!" cries lead character Andrew Sterling shortly after offing his first enemy helicopter, invoking cringes from everyone within earshot).

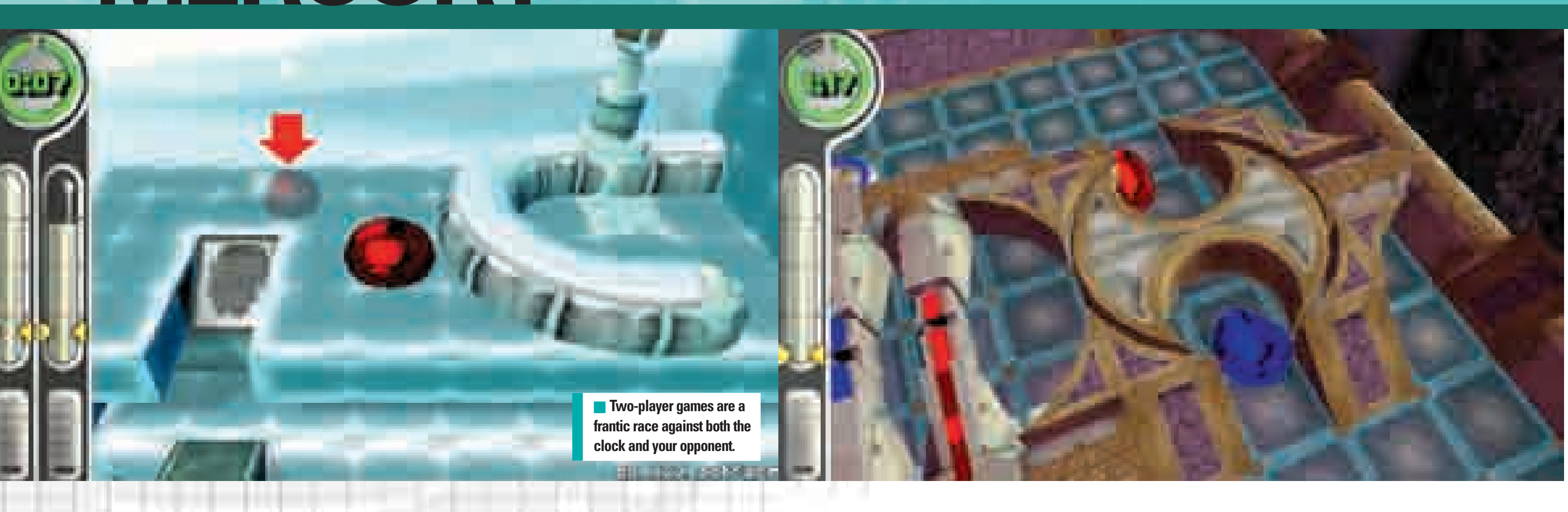
That *Cold Winter* has slipped in our estimations is a disappointment, as all the pieces were there for it to be one of the best examples of the genre on the PlayStation2 – it just needed Swordfish to put them together in the right order. Unfortunately, what we've had the opportunity to play so far feels like a stripped-down version of the creators' true intentions, cobbled together in order to get the game out ahead of schedule. Hardly the approach that such an initially promising title deserves.

"HOW COLD WINTER CAN HAVE GONE FROM LOOKING LIKE SOMETHING SPECIAL TO BEING JUST ANOTHER FPS IN A YEAR IS RATHER CONFUSING"

HERE'S ONE WE MADE EARLIER

Cold Winter **still contains some of the ideas that we liked when we first saw it, such as the opportunity for players to create their own items and weaponry using various objects picked up through exploration. What you create can ultimately either improve your arsenal (homemade Molotov Cocktails can often be more effective then a basic Frag Grenade) or your chances of finding bonus items – lockpicks, for instance, come in handy when faced with a locked armoury door. However, even this is rather more limited and obvious than we'd hoped; not only are items' recipes given to you rather than discovered through ingenuity, but there's always as many combinable items as there are places to use them.**

ARCHER MACLEAN'S MERCURY



Two-player games are a frantic race against both the clock and your opponent.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Ignition
DEVELOPER: Awesome Studios
RELEASE: TBA (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

He's well known for his pool and karate games, but Maclean's first PSP title is a radical departure.

A NEW ARCHER MACLEAN GAME AND NOT A POOL BALL IN SIGHT

One thing we'll say about *Mercury* is that simply gazing at screenshots doesn't do it any justice. While pictures will certainly give you an indication of just how abstract it is – real-life objects like trees were taken out so the mercury blob itself couldn't be sized – *Mercury* truly impresses once you actually see it in motion. Watching a glob of toxic liquid as it oozes and slides around the well-constructed levels is worryingly hypnotic and it's easy to forget the task at hand as you continue to watch the mercury slide around the stages with dazzling realism.

This is also a title that's unique on Sony's portable and is all the better for it. Sure, there's no denying the visual splendour of *Ridge Racers* or the sheer enjoyment gleaned from *Hot Shots Golf*, but these are titles we've already seen before in one form or another, so it's here that *Mercury* stands apart. It may appear to share similarities with other, well-established puzzlers – some people have even dubbed it this generation's *Tetris* – but *Mercury* is more a solid amalgamation of everything that has come before it, and yet somehow feels refreshingly new.

The premise – as with all good puzzlers – is simple: guide a small blob of liquid metal through a shifting maze. While you start with just one ball of mercury, each level's increasing difficulty means you'll be taking on various new masses and colours (not to mention splitting into several smaller globules) in order to reach each goal. The tasks themselves may be relatively straightforward, but the way you go about achieving them is anything but. Simple races against the clock, lighting a predetermined amount of beacons and reaching the exit with as big a blob of metal as possible may sound boring, but they work perfectly thanks to solid level design and an addictive urge to beat your previous high score.

Later stages such as boss levels throw in monsters who'll think nothing of biting out huge mouthfuls of your blob whenever you stray too close to them; add gates, teleporters and anti-gravity sections and it all starts to get more taxing than a gung-ho Gordon Brown.

With six large levels and an unlockable seventh (not to mention several themed bonus stages that expand on ideas in the main game), *Mercury* is already looking like it will have plenty of staying power. If only it was going to be using the nifty motion sensor. Still, there's always *Mercury* 2…

Things start off simple, but later levels grow in scope and complexity.

"WATCHING A GLOB OF TOXIC LIQUID AS IT OOZES AROUND THE LEVELS IS WORRYINGLY HYPNOTIC"


eMag

MONSTER HUNTER

CAPCOM VENTURES FORTH WITH AN ONLINE RPG FOR THE PLAYSTATION. WHATEVER NEXT?

PS2 **As a company, Capcom has some serious making up to do as far as online PS2 gamers are concerned.** The UK release of *Resident Evil: Outbreak* was cruelly shorn of its online element, leaving it an impotent also-ran rather than a must-have trailblazer. *Monster Hunter* is the first step to rebuilding those bridges.

The game itself is standard online multiplayer RPG fare with the opportunity to play single-player offline as well, but even at preview stage it's clear that Capcom's efforts have focused firmly on network play. The single-player missions are very tough indeed; rather than adapting the missions for solo play, it's merely possible to undertake roughly the same challenges only with no back-up – the result is some pretty serious balancing issues that render the game somewhat redundant as a solo exercise. This is going to be one for those with broadband only.

So it's all the more puzzling, then, that the game won't support the headset, instead asking players to communicate with their co-adventurers using a USB keyboard – because we all have one of those knocking around, right? This makes things more chaotic than they need to be, as the times when communication is of most use tend to be when teaming up to slay an almightily huge foe. Barking orders would make this co-operative battling much easier, but typing messages just isn't practical. Hopefully, Capcom will realise this and incorporate headset compatibility before the game's release.

The game itself involves the player entering a town and starting a quest. This can be undertaken alone, with friends or left open so that other gamers can join in. Up to four players can take part in a quest, which typically involves killing the NPC monsters (hence the name of the game); by working together the chances of success are considerably increased. The action takes place against NPCs only – there's no battling against other gamers – and the quests themselves are bite-sized, designed to be completed in around 30 minutes, as opposed to keeping players online for hours at a time.

The game looks rather lovely, with grand outdoor areas containing some truly terrifying monsters, although sound is little more than perfunctory (exacerbated by the fact that you can't hear your adventuring chums). However, at this stage the biggest gameplay problem seems to be the camera, which cannot be locked on to a target. Given the large areas in which monster-hunting takes place, and the somewhat hectic nature of the combat, it's all to easy to ignore the huge toothy beast bearing down on you and concentrate instead on battering the hell out of a nearby wall.

That said, the game is shaping up quite nicely. The PS2's online capabilities have been overlooked by the majority of publishers, so it's good to see someone prepared to give it a go (even if it is the same someone who made a pig's ear of *Resident Evil: Outbreak*…). Whether this will be the game that sends the masses rushing to buy their network adaptors remains to be seen (although it's highly unlikely) but publishers like Capcom deserve some encouragement for their fledgling online titles.

> "THE PS2'S ONLINE CAPABILITIES HAVE BEEN OVERLOOKED BY MANY PUBLISHERS, SO IT'S GOOD TO SEE SOMEONE GIVE IT A GO"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 27 May '05
GENRE: MORPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

■ Team up with up to three buddies, then head off hunting animals and undertaking quests in order to earn cash and kudos.

SHOOT THAT POISON ARROW

One area where *Monster Hunter* does look very promising is in the amount of customisation available. As well as the basic elements governing physical appearance, the game features a plethora of weapons and items to keep an eye out for; by mixing items together, you can create new things – some useful, some not. The booty earned by carrying out the quests can be reinvested in improved armour and weapons – which are important, as these will deteriorate the more they're used. As if that wasn't enough, some missions also allow the well-equipped player to mine for precious metals, hunt insects, cook and even go fishing. These interesting sidelines aren't exactly games in themselves, but they add to the long-term appeal.



■ Working together is the best way to defeat most monsters.

■ Spend your beast-killing rewards on enormous weapons.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Capcom is one of the most recognisable names in the videogames industry, marrying innovation with commercial success for over 20 years. Previous money-spinning series that the company has brought to home consoles include *Street Fighter, Devil May Cry, Resident Evil, Mega Man* and *Viewtiful Joe*. We like all those games, therefore Capcom is good. End of story.

HISTORY

- **RESIDENT EVIL 4** 2005 [Cube]
- **DEVIL MAY CRY** 2001 [PS2]
- **DINO CRISIS** 2000 [Dreamcast]

■ Your allies are governed by AI, but if you think you could do better just take over.

■ The village is effectively a lobby where players can meet to go hunting together.

"MONSTER HUNTER OFFERS GAMERS THE CHALLENGE OF EXPLORING VASTLY DETAILED ENVIRONMENTS, CONFRONTING MAMMOTH CREATURES AND COMPLETING NUMEROUS QUESTS"
CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

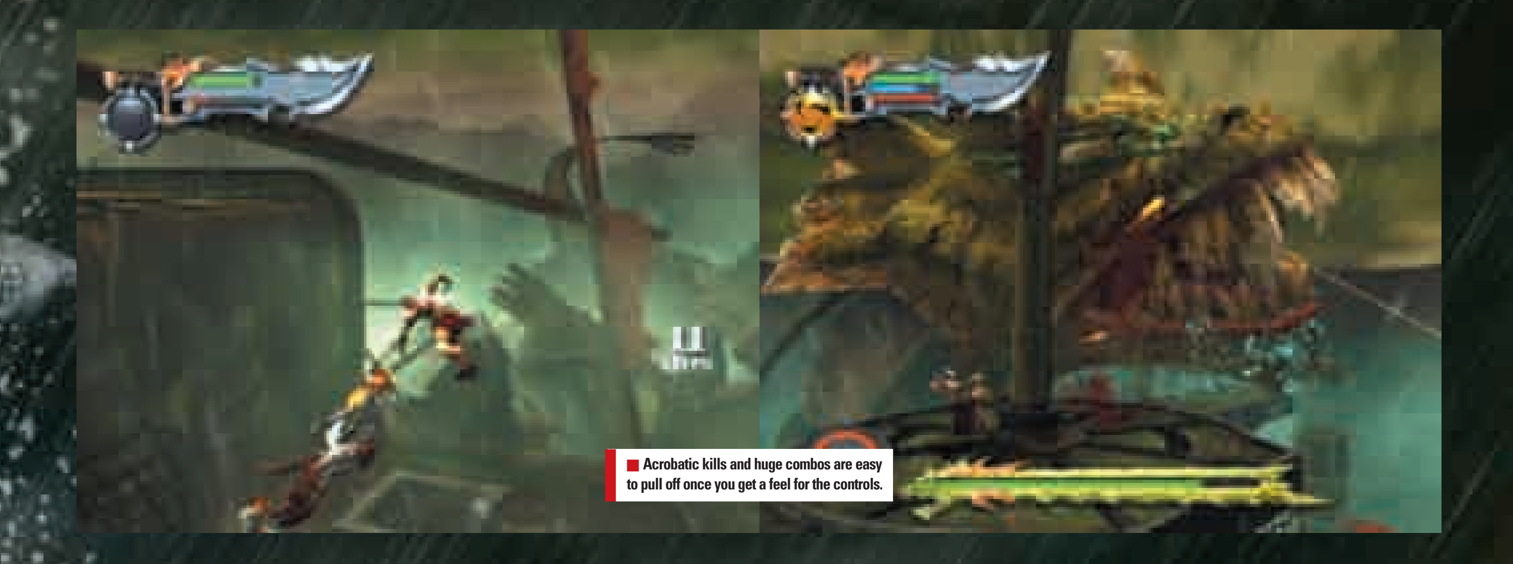
TYPING OF THE DEAD MONSTERS

TUROK x PHANTASY STAR ONLINE + SPEAK NO EVIL = MONSTER HUNTER



"I WOULD SAY THIS IS THE GAME I'VE BEEN WANTING TO MAKE SINCE I WAS A LITTLE KID"

DAVID JAFFE, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, SONY



Acrobatic kills and huge combos are easy to pull off once you get a feel for the controls.

SONY UNVEILS THE **ULTIMATE GOD** GAME

GOD OF WAR

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: June '05
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

HISTORY

God Of War represents the team's first foray into the crazy world of adventure games.

CONCEPT

Greek mythology clashes with *Prince Of Persia*-style gameplay to form an action adventure title with a heavy emphasis on brutal combat. Sold.

Chances are you may have skimmed through to this preview's Developer Profile box and seen the words 'twisted' and 'metal' used a few more times than you might feel comfortable with. It's understandable, really – the concept of driving round in circles firing all manner of silly weapons at other cars isn't most people's idea of fun (although in the developer's defence, vehicular combat isn't exactly the easiest genre to do well). But fear not. You won't be seeing any bulldozers battling with ice cream vans in *God Of War*. Just a lone warrior being dragged through hell trying to hold his own against the best Greek mythology has to offer, including the gods themselves. Yikes.

At its core, *God Of War* is a combat-heavy action game with the odd platform section or puzzle to break up the plentiful carnage. It's not often a game balances these elements really well but Sony has managed to mix it up with great success, each of the aspects being as well structured as the last. But the team remains relatively modest. "There were so many ready-made play mechanics in the Greek myths already – Medusa's head, Zeus' thunderbolts, battling Cyclops – that mixed with my love of the material, we had to do this game," explains David Jaffe, creative director on the project.

"*God Of War* is our attempt to really elevate the action-adventure genre to the next level. We wanted to bring combat, exploration, navigation, puzzle solving… all of the classic elements of the genre – but we wanted to bring them in a fresh way." And whether it's through the quick-time sequences, challenging and varied puzzles or just smashing your surroundings for fun and profit until you find your way, *God Of War* is nothing if not fresh.

All the violence, puzzles and platforming are tied together by a well-

GOD PROFILE

■ Often portrayed as a really big bearded old man who lives in the clouds, the sole creator according to Christianity would have been an odd concept to the Ancient Greeks and Romans – their plentiful deities for all occasions still live in infamy. In gaming, however, gods are usually far better represented.

HISTORY

- SHADOW HEARTS COVENANT 2005 [PS2]
- DOSHIN THE GIANT 2002 [Cube]
- SOLEIL 1994 [Mega Drive]



■ Possibly the most frustrating part of the game. You should see how far you're expected to climb.

"AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT, WE DECIDED WE WERE GOING TO BUILD A PLAYTESTING ROOM IN OUR OFFICE – THAT HAS PROVED TO BE A VERY GOOD DECISION"

TIM MOSS, LEAD PROGRAMMER, SONY

told and interesting narrative that unfolds as protagonist Kratos battles towards his ultimate goal. Once a mighty Spartan general, Kratos offered his soul to Ares in a moment of dire need in order to turn around a losing battle. Equipped and trained by the god of war himself, the 'hero' of the piece was eventually wronged by Ares and now seeks revenge on his former master. But creating an original work of fiction around existing Greek mythology hasn't been a simple process.

"The sheer amount of concept art and work that went into developing the characters and the look and feel of the game is pretty unique," explains Tim Moss, *God Of War*'s lead programmer. "I've never seen so much effort put into concepting a game out and making sure that every environment is unique and fits in with the theme of the game."

But just staying true to its subject matter hasn't been the only challenge with *God Of War*. The team also had to ensure that lead character Kratos and his exploits didn't jar with existing themes while giving him a believable and relevant back story. This prompted much interaction between Jaffe and lead concept artist Charlie Wen, whose description of Kratos as "disturbed" is about as close to the mark as it gets. "The things I said to him were like 'brutal', 'nasty', 'violent', 'anti-social', 'pissed off', 'angry', 'f**k you'," says Jaffe. "That was my direction to Charlie. I said 'just come into work, get angry and see what happens'."

But even after an untold number of ideas, sketches and suggestions, Kratos still wasn't quite there. "The solution was to start stripping everything away. Every time we took away a piece of armour, we started seeing more of an animalistic side to this character," explains Jaffe. But Kratos doesn't just *look* like an unstable pillar of pure anger…

It's exceptionally rare for an in-house title to embrace an 18 certificate on quite this level, but within mere minutes of play, Kratos will already have spilled gallons of blood (but not in a stupid *Nanobreaker* way) and ruined a lot of days. But the best is still to come. As he pursues Ares, Kratos will scythe bodies in two, fling enemies around like toys, gawp at (and, if you wish, satisfy) semi-naked ladies, hack off limbs and generally make a real mess of Athens. Beat enemies down enough and you'll be able to grab them for a quick-time 'fatality' – watching Kratos headbutt a hulking Minotaur before wrestling his blade down the beast's throat as you tap the Circle button as though your life depended on it is but one of such thrills that awaits you.

"We're trying to do so much right now – we want to bring this experience to people and we want it to be realistic," says environment designer Stig Asmussen. "In order to do that, we have to push the PlayStation2 as far as it possibly can go."

And lo, Sony has done just that. Wonderfully modelled and animated creatures abound in the gorgeous and epic themed settings and it's difficult to believe that the PS2 hardware can be pushed much further. "Technologically, four or five years into a console, most of the big problems have been solved so it's just a question of doing it better than everyone else," explains Tim Moss. and with its over-the-top take on action and mythology, *God Of War* is destined to do

LUNGE, PARRY, RIPOSTE

As *Street Fighter III* fans will tell you, parrying is way awesome. But while Capcom's fighter offers the parry as a '1337' alternative to blocking, *God Of War* not only invites the player to parry but pretty much demands it. By tapping the block button exactly as an enemy attack comes in, you'll give yourself a split-second advantage to launch an attack of your own or, if you've earned the ability, unleash a powerful counter. It's amazing just what can actually be parried – a speeding warhammer, a hydra's entire head and neck, or even multiple slashes in quick succession if your hand-eye co-ordination is superhuman. Just don't go thinking you're the only character in the game with this handy ability, eh?



FOR THOSE ABOUT TO BLEED…

Given its heavy basis in Greek mythology, *God Of War*'s cast is probably as predictable as it is impressive. But even though the faces might be a touch familiar, Sony's handling of the characters' style is nothing short of spectacular. From Harpies that flit about the sky and generally make nuisances of themselves to towering giants and Minotaurs, there's plenty for Kratos to kill in *God Of War*. Here are just a few of the highlights.

MEDUSA

■ Having snakes for hair may have gone out of fashion hundreds of years ago but the petrifying powers of the Queen of the Gorgons are proof that this 'do still can't be beaten for pure mystical functionality. Avoid her crippling gaze, beat her into submission and wrench off that lovely head of hers to grant yourself the power to turn your enemies to stone.

CYCLOPS

■ While it'll come as little surprise that this guy's single eye is quite the weak spot, Kratos' comparatively slight stature makes reaching it some task. When a foe's weapons are bigger than you are, you know you're in for a tough fight and you'll need to make good use of the evade functionality of the right analogue stick if you don't want to become Kratos paste.

CERBERUS

■ One dog, three heads. Sure, the maths doesn't work but these guys are tough customers regardless. Luckily for you, they usually start life as little pups which, unsurprisingly, are much simpler to do away with than their fully grown forms. Take too long, though, and you'll wind up surrounded by hardy, fire-breathing canines that really want to hurt you. They totally will, too.

ARES

■ Ladies and gentlemen, the god of war himself. Once Kratos' master and mentor, a cruel trick caused his mortal servant to turn on him and now Ares is public enemy number one. Quite how you'll defeat a mile-high god in battle is a mystery that you'll have to solve over the course of the game, but kill the god of war you must. So yeah, good luck with that.



Some of the later combos help clear massive areas of enemies at once.

HACK, SLASH, IT'S ALL IN THE MIND

Everyone likes cutting bad things to pieces. That's a fact. How convenient, then, that *God Of War* grants you so many ways to do this. By collecting red orbs – where have we seen that before? – you're able to level up the Blades of Chaos (the twin-chained blades that are eternally fused to Kratos' arms), unlocking a whole host of new attack patterns and abilities such as counter attacks and high-flying aerial manoeuvres. With these, it's possible to string together massive chain attacks that yield even greater rewards and tear enemies to ribbons in mere seconds. At the last count, we'd managed to ride the combo counter just beyond the 250 mark…

just that. "We said 'let's go find some fight scenes in movies' because that was how we wanted this guy to move, how nasty we wanted him to be," Jaffe continues. "But it's weird because while we thought we'd find all these great movies, movie fights are really kind of tame when you think about it." Still, compared to Kratos' ungentlemanly conduct, even the likes of *Manhunt* and *Mortal Kombat* look 'kind of tame'…

The team is obviously rather proud of what they've done with *God Of War*. "People are going to go 'Oh my God, this is what action adventure games have supposed to have been from the start'," says Jaffe, a sentiment echoed by the rest of the development staff. "I would say this is the game I've been wanting to make since I was a little kid." But this degree of satisfaction hasn't come without substantial effort.

"I'm always the guy that the engineers want to strangle because I try to absolutely push this engine to the max," adds level artist Ken Feldman. Indeed, the rigorous tuning and testing has been integral to the quality of the game as it is now. "Playtesting is fantastically important and this is the first game that we've really gone to town on testing while the game has been in development," explains Moss. "We'd bring five or six people in from local colleges, sit them down in front of the latest version of whatever level we've been building and watch them play it. Then we'd notice all of the things that they don't do right."

"WONDERFULLY MODELLED AND ANIMATED CREATURES ABOUND IN THE GORGEOUS AND EPIC THEMED SETTINGS – IT'S DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT THE PLAYSTATION2 HARDWARE CAN BE PUSHED MUCH FURTHER"

Having played a little of *God Of War*, it's plain to see that Greek mythology is the game's biggest influence. It's not often that we get excited just researching for previews but in this case we've done just that – so many of the myths and tales speak of characters, creatures and events that would translate so perfectly to this game that for them to be overlooked would be a crying shame. There are the aspects we know, of course, such as Zeus' assistance in dispatching his most loathed son. But what of Ares' twin sons Phobus and Deimus (gods of fear and panic) who were said to join him in battle? Could make for an epic boss encounter, no?

There's simply so much within the mythology that Sony could easily have sat back and churned out a tale based upon it. But it hasn't done that. Whether such scenarios make the final game or not, we're confident that *God Of War* will be one of the best in-house games from Sony in a long time.

Yes, it's that good. And combat designer Richard Foge agrees. "You should play *God Of War* because it'll get you laid. *God Of War* is f**king rad." Quite.

DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Sony's first-party output has always been something of a mixed bag but the situation seems to have intensified of late – how absolute drivel like *Syphon Filter: Omega Strain* and *The Getaway: Black Monday* end up alongside the likes of *Gran Turismo 4* is beyond us.

HISTORY

- **TWISTED METAL BLACK** 2001 [PS2]
- **TWISTED METAL 2** 1997 [PSone]
- **TWISTED METAL** 1996 [PSone]



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

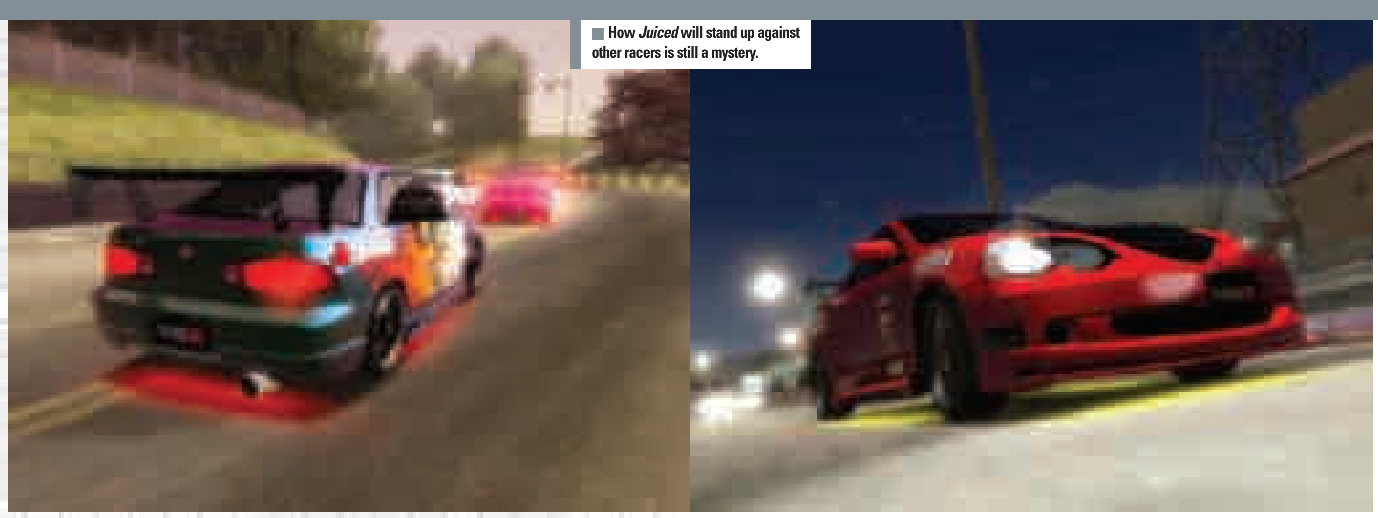
"FOR $200, ANYONE CAN CONCEIVE A GOD ON VIDEO"

PRINCE OF PERSIA x ANCIENT GREECE + MYTHICAL CREATURES = GOD OF WAR

■ When an enemy is sufficiently weakened, a quick-time sequence enables a quick kill.

■ As the game progresses, you'll learn that Kratos really isn't a guy to cross…

JUICED



How *Juiced* will stand up against other racers is still a mystery.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Juice Games
RELEASE: May '05
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-8

CONCEPT

Yet another street racer is vying for attention on the gaming block, but there's something a little different about *Juiced*…

SQUEEZING THE LAST DROPS OUT OF THE STREET RACER?

Anyone who has reservations about the adage 'third time lucky' need only look as far as Juice Games. Its first effort, *Lamborghini*, was finished and ready to hit the shelves before publisher Rage filed for bankruptcy. Its next stab at the racing market, *Juiced*, was at a similar stage in September last year before publisher Acclaim also filed for bankruptcy. So, with some trepidation, the world is watching THQ as it prepares to unveil a modified version of *Juiced*.

The most heartbreaking part of this story is that both *Lamborghini* and the original *Juiced* are fine games. The latter is no mere imitator of the *Need For Speed Underground* series, but a genuine alternative that happens to focus on the street-racing scene. The reason why *Juiced* is now an even more tempting prospect is because the extra time and financial input given by THQ has meant that the game is in the unique position of being a car-modding sim with a decent racing engine attached. Whereas serious racing fans wouldn't touch *Need For Speed* with a barge pole, chances are they'll be more than happy to indulge their customisation fantasies with *Juiced*.

Although the game may not have the unnecessary diversity of many of its competitors, the modding aspect contains everything a boy-racer could want, from custom car parts to kaleidoscopic paintjobs. The list of cars, now totalling 53 thanks to the addition of the new VW Beetle, the Mazda RX 8 and the Ford Focus SVT, should keep players entertained long enough to complete Career mode, and encourage them to dip into online play every now and again.

Initially, the main pull of *Juiced* was the opportunity to bet on the outcome of races to build up the necessary funds for pimping your ride. This can still be done, either on- or offline, with players opting to race, or merely spectate and cheer on their favourite.

When the game finally arrives in May it will be a much-improved version of the *Juiced* that Acclaim almost released last year. However, the time extension is likely to come at a cost, with *Gran Turismo 4* already on the shelves, and both *Midnight Club 3* and *Forza Motorsport* also due in May. Does *Juiced* have the horsepower to leave the competition behind? It would be nice to think so.

"THE EXTRA TIME IN DEVELOPMENT MEANS THE GAME IS IN THE UNIQUE POSITION OF BEING A CAR-MODDING SIM WITH A DECENT RACING ENGINE ATTACHED"



Juiced is about expressing yourself through the medium of ride-pimping.

This blurring effect has been made more colourful in the tweaked game.


eMag

MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

NEW INSTALMENT, SAME OLD WAR

WORLD WAR II + HOLLYWOOD – BEN AFFLECK = MOH: EUROPEAN ASSAULT

"THE AUTHENTIC WWII SUBJECT MATTER OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR FRANCHISE IS A GREAT PREMISE FOR A STORYTELLER"

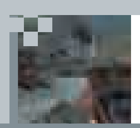
JOHN MILIUS, SCRIPTWRITER, EUROPEAN ASSAULT

This is the first *Medal Of Honor* title to put you in charge of a squad.

Rally mode lets you go bonkers and invincible – why not take on a tank?

MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT

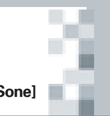


SERIES PROFILE

The *Medal Of Honor* team have been forced to raise their game with the emergence of the *Call Of Duty* brand and *Brothers In Arms. Frontline* was pretty good but they got into the comfort zone with *Rising Sun.*

HISTORY

- **MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN** 2003 [Multi]
- **MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE** 2002 [Multi]
- **MEDAL OF HONOR: UNDERGROUND** 2001 [PSone]



DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Summer '05
GENRE: Squad Shooter
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

More WWII FPS action but with plenty of new features bolted on and an all-new game engine.

IT'LL ALL BE OVER BY CHRISTMAS

PS2 **So, how do you explain the vogue for World War II games?** Is it simply that clunky old machine guns are more satisfying to use than any laser you could invent? Let's not forget that the war also offers a rich canvas on which to paint a story. With so many acts of heroism and perhaps the most sinister and evil enemy ever to stalk the planet, it's the perfect backdrop for many contented hours of running and gunning. If you can overlook the obvious jingoism, it's hard to argue with the sentiment.

Few could have foreseen how the *Medal Of Honor* series would develop into one of EA's biggest non-sports cash cows, but here we are at the ninth instalment. Yes, nine. In that time we've visited various theatres of war, but, somehow, shooting Nazis was always going to be far more satisfying than shoving bullets into the Japanese soldiers of *Rising Sun*. As a result this game sees us back in Europe in 1942 with the Third Reich once more in full effect. You probably gathered that from the title. Originally called *Dogs Of War*, the game will now ship on all formats as *European Assault* as EA aims to stop the PC and console versions diverging any further.

Rising Sun was criticised by many for not really doing enough; it was more of a '*Frontline 1.5*' with new graphics than a true sequel. The graphics were occasionally messy, the AI was a little off but above all it was too short. No such accusations can be levelled at *European Assault*, it would seem.

Three new elements are intended to satisfy gamers who were left feeling short-changed last time out, and the first of these relates to the number of soldiers active in the game world. *Frontline* offered 13, *Rising Sun* a slightly better 16; *European Assault,* however, will boast up to 75, which opens up mouth-watering possibilities for pitched battles on a scale never before seen on any console. This multiplayer development means levels are no longer built in the corridor format of previous games, but offer large, open battlefields with multiple route choices enabling you to tackle those spectacular trademark set pieces in whichever order you choose.

A feature we're more sceptical about is something EA is calling Rally mode. Based on the stories of soldiers who have, in moments of extreme stress during battle, gone into a kind of gung-ho trance, *European Assault* recreates this with an effect that bears an uncanny resemblance to bullet time. Build up the Rally meter next to your health bar and when full it can be activated at will. You'll get a tunnel-vision effect on the screen, time slows down and you have infinite ammo and invulnerability for however long the effect lasts. Hmm.

Perhaps, sensibly, EA has chosen not to pick up the cliff-hanger ending of *Rising Sun* and release *Rising Sun 2*, although that's still a likelihood in the future, but *European Assault* shows enough potential to suggest *Medal Of Honor* is still in the game despite stiff competition from the likes of *Brothers In Arms*.

"UP TO 75 SOLDIERS CAN BE ACTIVE IN EUROPEAN ASSAULT'S GAME WORLD AT ONE TIME"

FRIENDLY FIRE

For the first time in a *Medal Of Honor* game you'll get to command a squad of up to five men. EA dabbled with various systems for ordering them about but became concerned that that game would become more about squad strategy and lose its all-action edge. As a result, the commands available are extremely limited. Point the aiming reticule, click, and your men will move into position. Can such a simplified squad system add anything to the gameplay? As with Rally mode, we're reserving judgement until we've spent a good deal of time with it, but at the moment it looks rather tacked on.



Aiiee! A nazi. Seems to be a ghost one at that. But that would be silly.

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5



■ You now have a right-hand man to help you out. Another person to worry about or genuine helping hand?

THE WARRIOR WITHIN THIS SERIES BEEFS UP IN THE RIGHT AREAS

In an age where sequels are damned for ubiquity and lack of innovation, the *Dynasty Warriors* series has just about managed to keep its nose clean. Despite providing plenty of ammunition for cynics with its *Xtreme Legends* updates and *Samurai Warriors* spin-offs, Koei has managed to walk the tricky tightrope of garnering kudos for its series without drastically altering the formula too much for each sequel.

So perhaps it's no surprise to see *Dynasty Warriors 5* undergoing a minor nip and tuck rather than major surgery. Already released in Japan under the moniker *Shin Sangoku Mosou 4*, it's easy to see that no big changes are planned for the European release this summer. The graphics have been refined so the trademark battles are as vast and immense as ever, ensuring the series maintains its reputation for carnage and kill totals soaring past triple-digit scores.

Omega Force has attempted the unenviable task of beefing up the amount of enemies on the screen while keeping slowdown to an absolute minimum with mixed results. The draw distances are still disappointing and yet again split-screen appears to be creaking under the demands the developer is making; the Japanese and US releases show multiplayer to be plagued with the series-old problems of enemies suddenly appearing and mist obscuring most of the action. Hopefully, some of the fogginess will be scrubbed away for an optimised European release.

Bigger and better isn't necessarily the theme for this sequel. Some of the gameplay features from *Dynasty Warriors 3* return having skipped a generation, so yet again you can find weapons on the battlefield itself and enjoy the individual character Musou modes. Meanwhile, plenty of modes have been lost in the transition from *Dynasty Warriors 4*, with Kingdom mode and Duels the immediately noticeable sacrifices. The cast list remains the same with slight tweaks to existing move lists and six new characters to get stuck into, so instead it will be the revamped bodyguard system that will grab long-term fans.

Along with the set of soldiers who used to follow you around, you now get a much more powerful soldier to act as right-hand man. Meanwhile, the bodyguards have an array of weapons to choose from (spears, crossbows, swords and fans being a few), so you can mould your mini-team whatever way you choose. Better yet, your team can develop skills in the heat of battle so they can heal you or raise the morale of the army. It's a cute addition and should slot in nicely alongside the minor gameplay tweaks under the surface, such as the Revolution Attack, where if you meet certain requirements in battle you can chain nine attacks together in a combo rather than the usual six. Given the frantic nature of *Dynasty Warriors'* battling, it should provide some brain to go with the brawn.

Also new is Musou Awaking, an item that gives your character a power and speed boost lasting 30 seconds. It's something else to shout about on the press release but the preview code suggests it's little more than another power-up. With 48 characters with their own unique endings and all the weapons to discover once more, there should be plenty of replay value for fans in this latest slice of *Dynasty Warriors*. But will this be enough to entice everyone else?

"IT'S PERHAPS NO SURPRISE THAT DYNASTY WARRIORS 5 IS UNDERGOING A MINOR NIP AND TUCK RATHER THAN MAJOR SURGERY"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Koei
DEVELOPER: Omega Force
RELEASE: Q2 '05 (Japan/US: Out Now)
GENRE: Strategy Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

■ The series that's renowned for letting you embark on huge battles provides a sequel that – surprise! – lets you embark on huge battles.

MAKE ME A SEQUEL

First, there was *Dynasty Warriors*. Then there was *Dynasty Warriors 2*. Then it started to get silly with *Dynasty Warriors 3* receiving an *Xtreme Legends* update and *Dynasty Warriors 4* getting two separate updates (*Xtreme Legends* and *Empires*). Out of Koei's big-name PAL trio (*Kessen, Dynasty Warriors* and *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms*), it's *Dynasty Warriors* that has drawn the global plaudits, combining accessibility with China's rich cultural history. With DS and PSP versions also on the way, it'll be interesting to see how sales figures fare, especially since some long-term fans are finally starting to grumble about the cash-cow being milked a little dry…



PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ Koei has developed something of a cult fanbase over the years with its own distinct style, with its *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms, Kessen* and *Dynasty Warriors* PAL releases garnering a bigger following than anyone – perhaps even Koei – might have expected.

HISTORY

- **DYNASTY WARRIORS 4: XTREME LEGENDS** 2004 [PS2]
- **DYNASTY WARRIORS 4** 2004 [PS2]
- **DYNASTY WARRIORS 3** 2002 [PS2]

■ Ooh, rain effects. Very nice. We're not so sure we like the permanent fog on the battlefield, mind…

"DYNASTY WARRIORS 5 MARKS THE NEXT FULL INSTALMENT OF THE TACTICAL ACTION SERIES THAT HAS CONSTANTLY WON PRAISE"
KOEI PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ROUND 5… FIGHT!

CHINESE HISTORY + BIG FIGHTS + FOG = DYNASTY WARRIORS 5


eMag

DESTROY ALL HUMANS!

THEY'VE COME FOR OUR LEADER, BUT THEY DEMAND OUR RESPECT…



Crypto's a fan of NWA, as his attitude towards this puny cop car shows.

Just for a minute, place yourself in the shoes of an alien who's landed on Earth for the first time. You look at the humans watching endless reality shows, fretting about terrorism, buying McFly albums. Does this seem like the dominant species to you? Don't those under-used brains need harvesting? Wouldn't your species make much more suitable inhabitants of this lovely world? You've just had your first taste of *Destroy All Humans!*.

Over the past few years, Pandemic has been perfecting the third-person action game, with *Mercenaries* and *Star Wars Battlefront* proving massive successes. This work seems to have been leading up to what seems like the studio's pet project, where the teams have been allowed full creative freedom. *Destroy All Humans!* is bursting with creativity and humour, making it one of the most original games to appear in 2005. Almost every stereotype about aliens, abduction and cover-ups is here, meaning players will be required to mutilate cattle, take control of human minds and perform invasive procedures with the Anal Probe weapon. Enough said.

"YOU CAN PERFORM INVASIVE PROCEDURES WITH THE ANAL PROBE WEAPON. ENOUGH SAID"

The action is broken down into three categories, each of which will have to be mastered in order to progress. There are simple combat abilities that see you using one of four weapons to eliminate humans, and then there are several psychic abilities that give Crypto, the leading little grey man, a chance to levitate his prey, read their thoughts and rip the brains from their heads. Last but not least, you can hop into your UFO and lay waste to anything and everything in the local area – pretty standard stuff for a Pandemic title.

Each mission takes place in a specific surrounding such as a farm in the US Deep South, a country fair and Washington DC. The size of each location is extremely impressive and, once the main objectives have been completed, you're encouraged to explore your surroundings, undertake mini-missions and generally wreak havoc in a *GTA* style. When such a solid physics engine meets a game with such a dark sense of humour, the result looks set to be out of this world.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: Australia
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Pandemic
RELEASE: May '05
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Put on the boots of a little grey man, bent on wiping out man.



Don't bother harvesting the President's brain – it's probably not worth the effort…

Take to the skies in your flying saucer and lay waste to all who oppose you.

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

NANOSTRAY

A REAL DAMN AND BLAST-'EM-UP

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Majesco
Developer: Shin'en
Genre: Shoot-'em-up
Players: 1-2



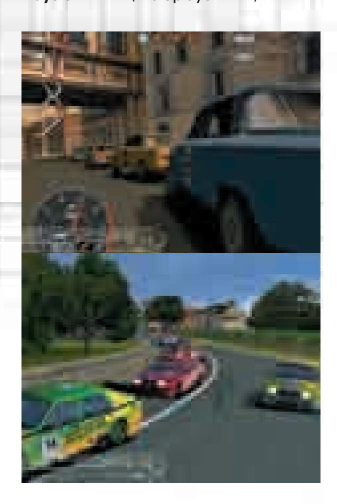
Decent vertical shoot-'em-ups sort the hardcore men from the casual boys – if only because they require practice, diligence and plenty of skill to conquer. As such, we suspect that *Nanostray* will find its own cluster of wanton fanboys ready to slaver attention all over it, as well as being the sole cause of many a broken DS through sheer frustration. Hundreds of enemies, hundreds more bullets, a raft of power-ups and sub-weapons (all of which can be activated via the touch screen), and over ten stages are here to plough through, as well as wireless two-player co-op play for those with like-minded friends. It certainly looks the part, even in 3D, so it's hard to imagine that the gameplay won't be just as good.

RELEASE DATE: JULY '05

SCAR

RACING'S A REAL ADVENTURE

Format: PS2/Xbox/PC
Origin: Italy
Publisher: Black Bean
Developer: Milestone
Genre: Racing
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)



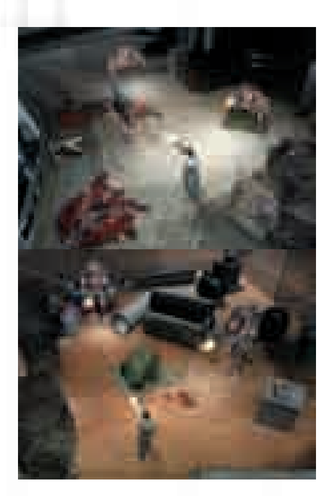
With *Gran Turismo 4* and *GTR* beating it to the punch, *SCAR* – an abbreviation of Squanda Corse Alfa Romero – is certainly going to have its work cut out to win over racing fans. That said, the decision to try to integrate a racing sim with elements of classic role-playing (creating the first ever 'CARPG'… Milestone's words, not ours) is an interesting one; players don't just tune their cars, but also their driving skills by improving abilities such as hand-eye co-ordination, reflexes and even the Tiger Effect that allows you to turn back time and correct driving errors. We hope the final product doesn't turn out to be as ridiculous as it sounds, but at least the developer's track record provides a glimmer of hope.

RELEASE DATE: MAY '05

PREYGROUND

TAG, MR ALIEN – YOU'RE IT

Format: PC
Origin: Finland
Publisher: TBA
Developer: Frozenbyte
Genre: Shoot-'em-up
Players: 1



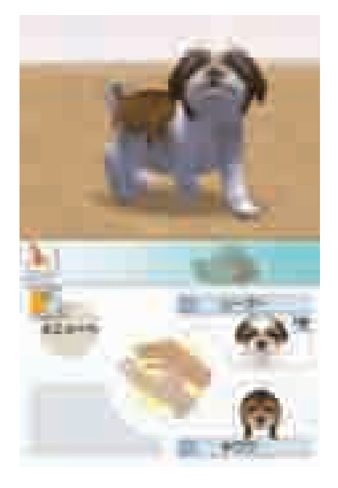
Watch out, Team 17 – someone's stolen the opportunity to make a next-generation *Alien Breed* from right under your nose. At least, that's what *Preyground* looks and sounds like; aliens invade a colony base and, as the only gun-toting hero left, it's up to you to fend them off. It's horribly simple, yes, but then some of the best ideas always are. Still, at least Frozenbyte has had the sense to try to innovate by including the ability to upgrade your weaponry with all manner of bolt-on extras, destructible environments and even enemies that have an aversion to light, giving players an additional strategy against the more powerful beasts. It might be coming from an unknown developer, but don't write off *Preyground* just yet.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05

NINTENDOGS

ALRIGHT, STOP – PUPPY TIME

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House
Genre: Simulation
Players: 1-2



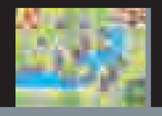
Despite the disparaging looks we've drawn by admitting we like the idea of having our own portable dog, we're awaiting the release of *Nintendogs* with great anticipation. Okay, so it does sound a lot like *Dogz*, a desktop pet released for the PC years ago, but the truth is more interesting. For example, rather than being a laborious iteration of a Tamagotchi, the aim is to train your dog by playing with it and going for walks (where you'll meet other dogs), ultimately making it good enough to win tournaments and other challenges. That said, though, we're interested to try breeding our dog with ones belonging to other people. Who knows what cross-breed nightmares we'll be able to concoct?

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05



Delayed – The Warriors (Multi)

■ No details or screens made it obvious this wouldn't arrive by June, but Rockstar has now officially slipped the game of the 1979 gang movie back to the end of the year.



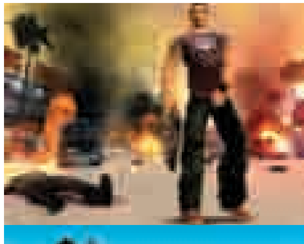
Delayed – Advance Wars DS (DS)

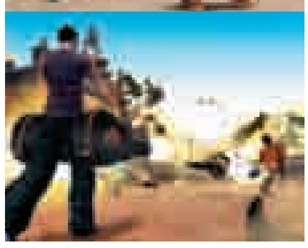
■ Damn you, Nintendo – one of the most anticipated titles for your new handheld and you've taken it off the release schedule completely. It had better be at E3, or so help us…

TOTAL OVERDOSE

AY CARUMBA! SCI ESTA LOCO!

Format: PS2/Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: SCi Games
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1







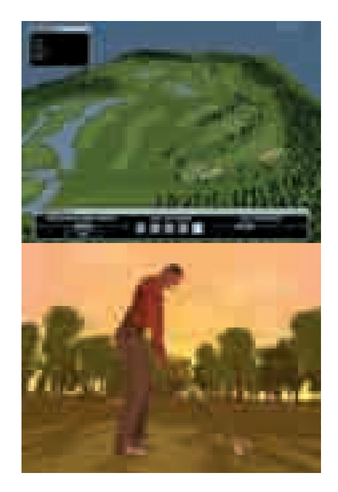
If SCi had its tongue wedged any further into its cheek with *Total Overdose*, it'd topple over sideways. True, the sombre overtones of the story (in which you have to take your brother's place in the DEA to investigate the mysterious death of your father) make it sound rather serious, but when the actual gameplay features insane amounts of gunplay, needless animal slaughter and a special move called the Sombrero Of Death, you know the developer isn't taking things quite as seriously as it could. Think the flavour of *El Mariachi* mixed with the action stylings of *True Crime* (only not quite as stilted) and you've got the right idea. It won't set the world alight, but it looks like great fun just the same.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05

CUSTOMPLAY GOLF

PLAYING IT WHERE IT LIES

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Fusion Labs
Developer: In-House
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-2 (2-4 Online)



From the look of these screenshots, you wouldn't think there's much about Fusion Labs' golf simulator that makes it stand out from the competition. However, by pitching itself as the *TrackMania* of the golf world, *CustomPlay Golf* offers players the chance to create their own courses from scratch, right down to the trees and rough. Every element of the game is customisable (including the option to import your own textures, models and sound effects), so the possibilities are limitless – and you can send courses to your friends before playing online with them. Of course, that's no guarantee that the actual golfing will be on a par with *Tiger Woods* or *Links*, so we hope there's plenty of polish there too.

RELEASE DATE: 6 MAY

FIRE EMBLEM: THE SACRED STONES

THERE GOES THE SOCIAL LIFE

Format: Game Boy Advance
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Intelligent
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1-4



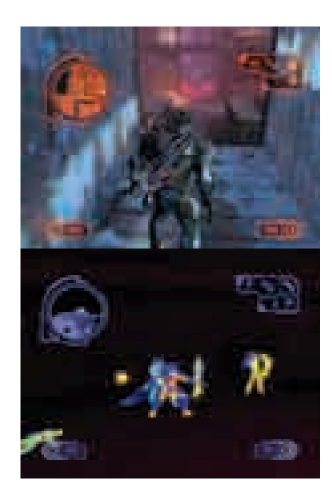
Between *Advance Wars* and *Fire Emblem*, Intelligent Systems seems to have the handheld strategy market sewn up – there isn't a game that can touch either title for quality. Just as *Advance Wars 2* continued the legacy of the first game, then, so too does *Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones*; the story and characters might be different, but the core strategy component of using your soldiers to repel enemies and complete missions across scores of maps remains almost identical. Of course, there are improvements (new character classes, enhanced progress options including special missions that unlock depending on your performance, and plenty of new monsters) but even the same game again would be fine by us…

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

PREDATOR: CONCRETE JUNGLE

AN EASY KILL? NOT LIKELY

Format: PS2/Xbox
Origin: UK
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Eurocom
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1

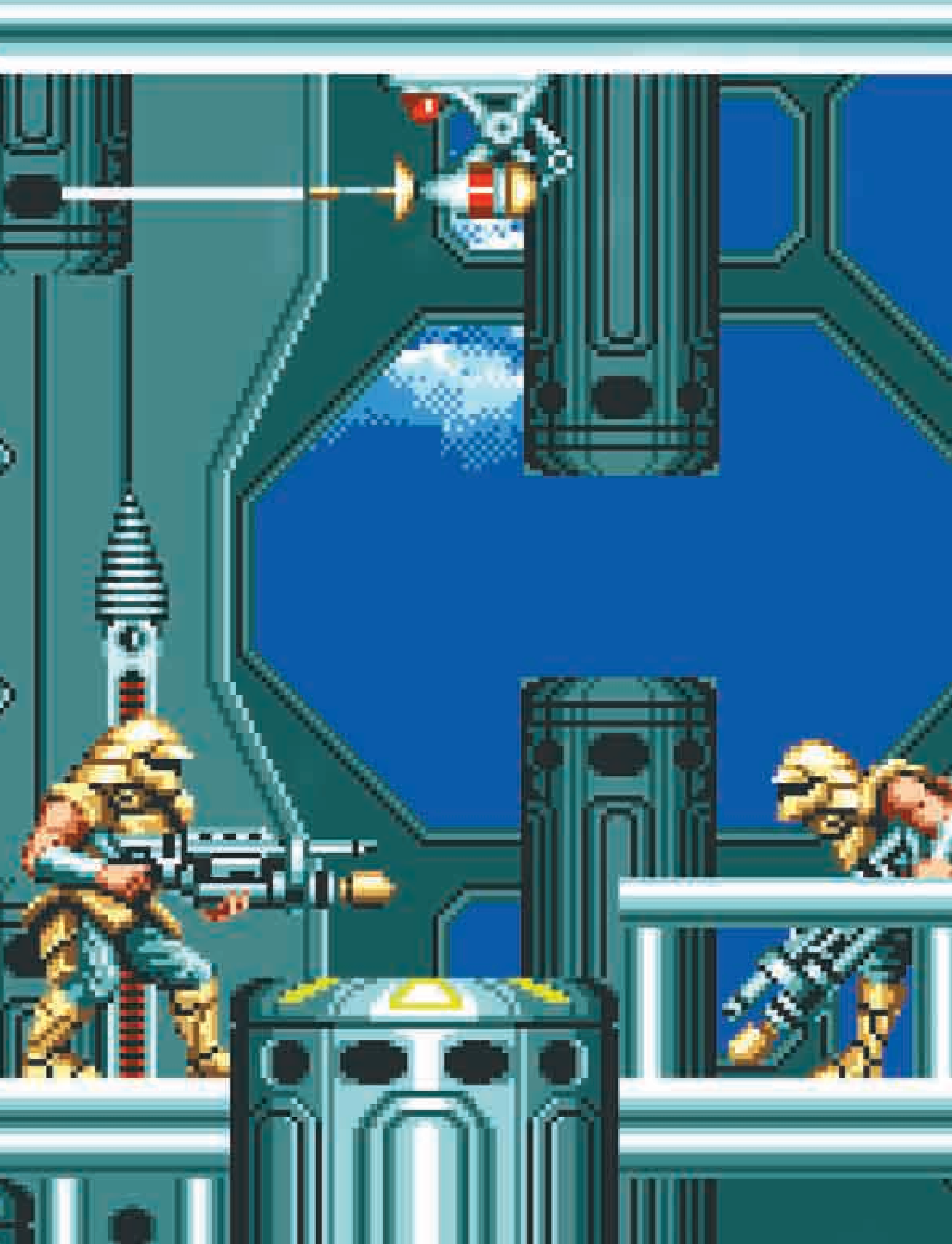


You'd have thought that Vivendi might have learnt from *Fight Club* that good film licences don't necessarily make great games. Unfortunately, the continued development of *Predator: Concrete Jungle* would suggest otherwise. While it thankfully has nothing to do with the awful *Alien Vs Predator* movie, it does look like a fairly standard 3D beat-'em-up despite all the added effects. Leading the Predator through two time periods inexplicably placed a thousand years apart, players can use all his weapons (Speargun, Smart Disk, Plasmacaster…) and various vision modes to kill anything that moves. And that appears to be it. We won't be holding our breath for anything revolutionary.

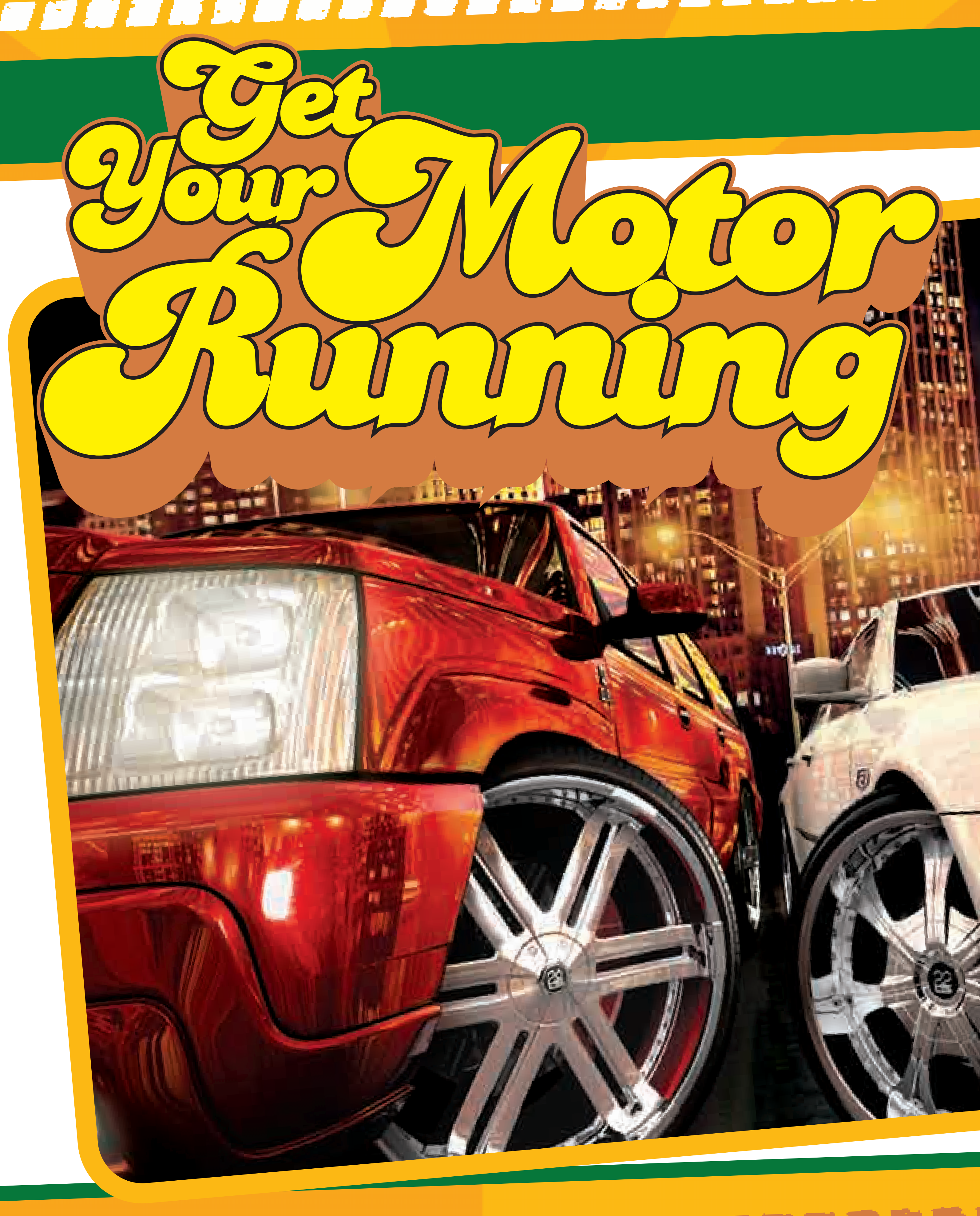
RELEASE DATE: Q2 '05



Purple – it's the new black for ninjas **Strider – Mega Drive [Capcom] 1989**



Get Your Motor Running





RACING GAMES HAVE BEEN A FIXTURE IN **ARCADES** AND ON **CONSOLES** SINCE THE **DAWN OF GAMING**. BUT NOW, WITH THE RELEASE OF THE LIKES OF **GRAN TURISMO 4** AND **FORZA MOTORSPORT**, THEY'RE FLOURISHING. HOW FAR HAS THE GENRE COME IN TWO DECADES? AND **HOW MUCH JUICE** IS LEFT IN THE TANK? **GAMES™** TALKS TO THE **BIG NAMES IN RACING GAMES** TO FIND OUT...

All gamers must be closet petrolheads. How else do you explain the popularity of racing games? From early arcade classics like *Out Run* and *Pole Position*, to today's charts being dominated by the likes of *Project Gotham Racing 2*, *Burnout 3* and *Need For Speed Underground 2*, the simple act of driving round a course faster than someone else has held a hypnotic appeal.

Yet for such a simple concept, translating the art of racing to the game format has been a journey fraught with problems, as the genre has evolved from a niche market championed by a few dedicated followers to one of the staples of the modern games market.

The reasons behind the popularity the genre has acquired are various. "Cars themselves have a beauty to them," explains Kazanori Yamauchi, president of Polyphony Digital and creator of the *Gran Turismo* series, "and communicating this beauty makes the games popular." But for freelance journalist Craig Gilmore, the sheer pleasure of chucking about a nice motor is what really counts. "Whether it's *Burnout* or *Gran Turismo*, a great racing game always feels fast," he says. "Knowing you're pushing it to the max is one of the most exhilarating feelings ever."

While advances in 3D technology have resulted in the racing genre becoming an indispensable part of the gaming landscape, this was not always the case. With the limitations of domestic 8-bit hardware forcing developers to stick to 2D routines, it fell to arcades to fill the void during the Eighties. Without pressures to keep hardware costs low (which afflicted home-computer developers), arcade developers could take the first steps into sprite-based 3D visuals.

By the mid-Eighties, sprite scaling (a technique whereby pseudo-3D visuals could be created by altering the size and location of sprites on screen) had seen games such as *Chase HQ* and *Out Run* become mainstays of the arcade scene, as Criterion's Alex Ward, producer of the *Burnout* series, fondly remembers. "*Out Run* showcased speed by way of the superscalar technology, I cannot describe ▷

Get Your Motor Running

▷ the influence that this game has had on me personally."

Although publishers attempted to bring the driving experience home to domestic formats, either by attempting over-ambitious ports of popular arcade racing games or by trying to reinvent the wheel using top-down or isometric camera angles to show the action unfolding, it ultimately wasn't until the SNES arrived with its Mode 7 matrix-based sprite rotation technology in the early Nineties that home consoles had a basis to rival the sprite-scaling arcade games of the mid- to late Eighties.

Although the 16-bit formats had proved themselves capable of running basic polygon graphic engines, the complexities of the new games required the bolstering of the equipment. Initially, Sega and Nintendo responded by placing RISC processors in cartridges for their 16-bit machines, with Sega going one step further in 1994 by releasing the ill-fated 32X 32-bit upgrade for the Mega Drive. But the costs involved drove up game prices (the Mega Drive port of *Virtua Racing* would sell for twice the price of a regular release) and it would only be when the Saturn and PlayStation arrived that polygon visuals replaced sprites in the home.

With years of untapped polygon-powered racers waiting in the arcades, it *Daytona USA* in the privacy of their own living rooms, the games' quick-blast arcade nature soon saw players hankering for racing titles with a greater level of depth.

In 1996, Psygnosis answered this call with *Formula One*. Developed by Bizarre Creations, it offered gamers the chance to select their favourite driver and contest the full 1995 Grand Prix season. The success was instantaneous – *Formula One* became the biggest selling game in Europe that year, and only *Final Fantasy VII* would sell more copies globally throughout the whole of 1996. This success was echoed by *Gran Turismo* the following year. If gamers had been impressed by *Formula One*, the game that Yamauchi and Polyphony Digital served up would knock even that into a cocked hat

RACING CERTS

THOSE ALL-IMPORTANT CHECKPOINTS IN RACING GAME HISTORY



'82

POLE POSITION (Arcade)

Eclipsing all other racing games before it, *Pole Position* blew gamers away with its blistering speed and handling. Now a staple in Namco's retro packs.



'86

OUT RUN (Arcade)

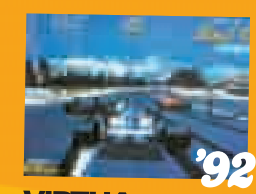
Debuting in 1986, *Out Run* remains one of the most iconic racing games ever. A revamped sequel is out now on Xbox and is still a rip-roaring ride.



'92

MARIO KART (SNES)

Proving that consoles could manage complex three-dimensional sprite visuals, *Mario Kart* was also an addictive and entertaining racer.



'92

VIRTUA RACING (Arcade)

Another Sega effort, *Virtua Racing* wasn't the first polygon racer, but it was the first to really showcase its potential. The 32X port was the best home version.

The Polygon Revolution

But even as Nintendo was preparing the SNES, arcade technology was leaping ahead thanks to the advent of polygon visuals. Arcade boards like Sega's Model 1 enabled developers to apply increasingly realistic physics models to true 3D environments, creating a far more realistic experience than sprite scalers could.

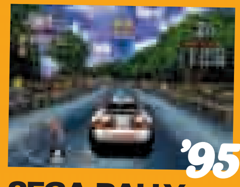
The popularity of the new technology wasn't wasted on the console publishers, but wasn't surprising that the early release schedules for the PSone and Saturn were dominated by arcade ports. As Graham Rigby, chief games designer on the *Colin McRae* series, recalls, the arrival of games like *Ridge Racer* on the PlayStation marked a maturing of the genre's image that was in line with Sony's own marketing of the time. "Having *Ridge Racer* as a launch game was when racing games grew up," he says. "Addictive and challenging, the handling at the time was miles ahead of anything else."

But while gamers were initially content playing *Ridge Racer*, *Sega Rally* and and start a series that, prior to the release of *Gran Turismo 4*, would sell 38 million copies worldwide.

An unprecedented 290 cars, a wealth of circuits and a career mode of such a scale that it would dwarf all other driving games of the time were tied to some of the most convincingly realistic handling seen; this instantly struck a chord with gamers, and for publishers, the message was clear – arcade-style racing was dead in the water and realism was where it was at.

But as Rigby reveals, there was more to creating racing games than simply trying to code a pure simulation. "Our approach to *Colin* has always been 'what kind of racing experience would I have if I was a world-class rally driver?'," he explains. "We develop games that convey the sense of speed, and exhilaration of the rally

> **"Cars themselves have a beauty to them, and communicating this beauty makes the games popular" – Kazanori Yamauchi**



'95

SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP (Arcade)

The first modern racer to employ licensed cars and realistic handling in a big way. The Saturn port was terrific.



'96

FORMULA ONE (PSone)

Every car, driver, circuit and lap of the 1995 GP season in one game. This may not sound much now, but in a market ruled by arcade ports, this was huge.



'97

GRAN TURISMO (PSone)

Nearly 300 cars, copious upgrades, a career mode that could last years and visuals to die for – these have seen the series sell 38 million copies thus far.



'01

BURNOUT (Xbox/PS2/GC)

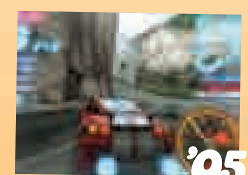
Burnout single-handedly revived the arcade racer market. And it's now evolved into the highly addictive *Burnout 3: Takedown*. Awesome.



'03

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2 (Xbox)

A prime example of how online play is prolonging the life of racing games – *PGR2* still enjoys a large following online.



'05

RIDGE RACERS (PSP)

This title best sums up the new wave of handheld racers – fast, fun and ideal for playing in short bursts. The PSP's onto a winner with this one.

sport through an accessible interface for most players."

It was a trend that would last throughout the rest of the 32- and 64-bit generation and well into the next. As pseudo-realistic simulations grew in popularity, only Namco's *Ridge Racer* series and the arcades would offer any kind of resistance to this.

The Current Generation

While the formula had worked to great effect in the 32- and 64-bit generations, gamers were showing signs of tiring of the identikit rally games, F1 sims and *GT* wannabes that cluttered the market – a breath of fresh air was needed, and in *Burnout*, the arcade racer had the vehicle to engineer a comeback. "Something like *Gran Turismo* is amazing if you like cars and you like games – if you like one but not the other then you're going to be screwed," quips Criterion's Alex Ward. "When we started the first *Burnout* we were keen to give the audience a fast, arcade-style driving game. We were huge fans of all the Sega stuff and felt that most of the games coming out had a heavy simulation vibe."

However, convincing the publishers was another matter. "The problem we faced at the beginning of *Burnout* was that although the consumers loved arcade driving games, many publishers really thought that arcade-style games were on their way out," says ▷



Get Your Motor Running

Ward. "Sure, the coin-op scene was rocky, but the love for this particular style of game was still there."

Nevertheless, Criterion's persistence paid off. Punter and pundit alike found the over-the-top crash antics and simplistic yet ferociously fast handling a refreshing change from the comparative drudgery of other racing titles, and the game duly went on to sell in the millions.

Like most genres, the advent of online gaming for the current generation of consoles has also helped to propel the racing game forwards, as Martin Wharmby, freelance journalist and member of Jolt – one of the UK's largest online gaming communities – explains. "Online gaming services such as Xbox Live have transformed racing games. Because you can race your mates online, you're no longer bound by the single-player mode to provide the lastability. Games just last longer now."

For Graham Rigby, the advent of large-scale online console systems has played a crucial part in this success. "Having a standard online interface for the consoles has been really good. The development for online play has been simplified and we can now concentrate on making excellent content for what is an integrated feature of the console. I just wish these services had a wider audience than they currently do."

The number of people taking their games online is growing, however, and as more gamers get connected, their demands increase accordingly. "I don't think the audience understands just how much hard work it is to get this working," says Ward. "With *Burnout 3* we worked really hard to make sure that our online experience matched the offline experience."

Despite this, however, there's no doubting that online play has become a vital part of any racing game. Indeed, to launch without online play now is a risky business, according to Wharmby. "Take *GT4*," he says. "Almost every PS2 and Xbox racing game nowadays has online play, so for *GT4* to ship without this leaves the PS2 bereft of its own must-have, exclusive online racer."

"The number of people taking their games online is growing, and their demands are increasing accordingly"

Racing To The Future

With new generations of consoles and handhelds looming large, racing games are once again facing a future full of new opportunities and challenges.

For the next generation of console, it's the area of online play that offers the most scope for expansion. Could gamers see themselves racing in official online national or international grand prix championships, or teaming up with other gamers to tackle an online 24-hour race like Le Mans? "This is definitely possible," Yamauchi believes. Rigby goes one step further: "real-world data will become very important. Real circuits recreated to a high level of accuracy and real race data, where you can actually download and race against Michael Schumacher in the Australian Grand Prix, even to the point of racing at the same time."

In the shorter term, Wharmby predicts that more emphasis will be placed on car modification as gamers seek a sense of identity. "Custom skins and overstated car mods are a gimmick at the moment, but that'll change," he says. "As drivers start to form teams, being able to create custom logos or have your cars the same colour will give you a sense of identity."

However, as Yamauchi hints, there's still more to come from current gameplay styles. "*Gran Turismo* is still in the process of perfecting its basics. Once these basics have been perfected, I feel I can start expanding the series to include street racing or a real version of *Burnout* as part of the *Gran Turismo* experience."

Alex Ward concurs. "We're still a long way off from offering a truly authentic driving experience – or indeed a car chase



Post mod-ern

While downloadable expansion packs may be a relatively new thing for console gamers, they're old hat for their PC counterparts, where developers and loyal fans alike create mods for years after a game's release. Racing games are no exception – case in point, Sierra Entertainment's *Grand Prix Legends*. Developed by driving sim specialist Papyrus and released in 1998, the simulation of the 1967 Grand Prix season is widely regarded as one of the most accurate sims ever. While the game is getting on a bit now, the countless tracks and cars that have been designed by its hardcore fan base are keeping the game alive. "This game won't die," says Dan Greenawalt, lead game designer on *Forza Motorsport*. "The community for *GPL* is as rabid today as it was five years ago. Few games have ever had this sort of staying power. The sim engine is starting to show its age, but the mod community has kept this title new and fresh."

that looks and feels exactly as it does in a Hollywood movie – but I can't see the *Burnout* team giving up just yet."

But while the impact the next generation will have on the genre remains to be seen, we're already starting to see how racing games are having to change to suit the next round of handheld consoles.

"The PSP hardware is quite attractive," says Yamauchi, "but as it's a handheld device the playing style will be different." That warning is being heeded by Ian Davies, senior producer of *Formula One 2005* for the PSP. "The way people play *F1* on PSP will be different from the PS2 – people won't want to sit on a train and play a full 65-lap race, for instance, so its length and span will be set within the parameters of PSP play."

Graham Rigby agrees, citing the potential for success for quick-play arcade games on the new formats. "Handheld machines with strong 3D capabilities are perfect for this type of racing game and will strengthen their popularity. This will mean publishers will be looking for new ideas and new types of arcade racers to suit the market."

However, It's not just the gaming habits of this market that are having an impact on development, as Craig McCracken, producer of *WRC* for the PSP, explains. "We wanted to avoid streaming lots of data so as to prolong battery life," he says. "Obviously, this isn't even a consideration on PS2, so you have to think about how to get the best out of the PSP without relying on commonplace techniques."

That said, many in the industry agree that the machines like the PSP hold much potential. "I think that wireless racing is going to be cool," says Alex Ward, while Graham Rigby sees the potential between connecting console and handheld as a key area – "consumers will also want to be able to transfer unlocks or points between console and handheld." Colin Berry, designer of *WipEout Pure*, is enthusiastic about the possibilities of content downloads: "Players are going to be able to download new tracks to race, new ships and new music tracks as well, adding extra value to the game after launch," he says.

But as Ward points out, the very fact games like *Ridge Racers* are possible at all is reason enough to be excited "[*Ridge Racers*] defines PSP for me. True handheld 3D racing, a game you can take anywhere. I can scarcely believe that I can carry around with me something better than all of the Namco coin-ops in my pocket."



Just how realistic is 'realistic'?

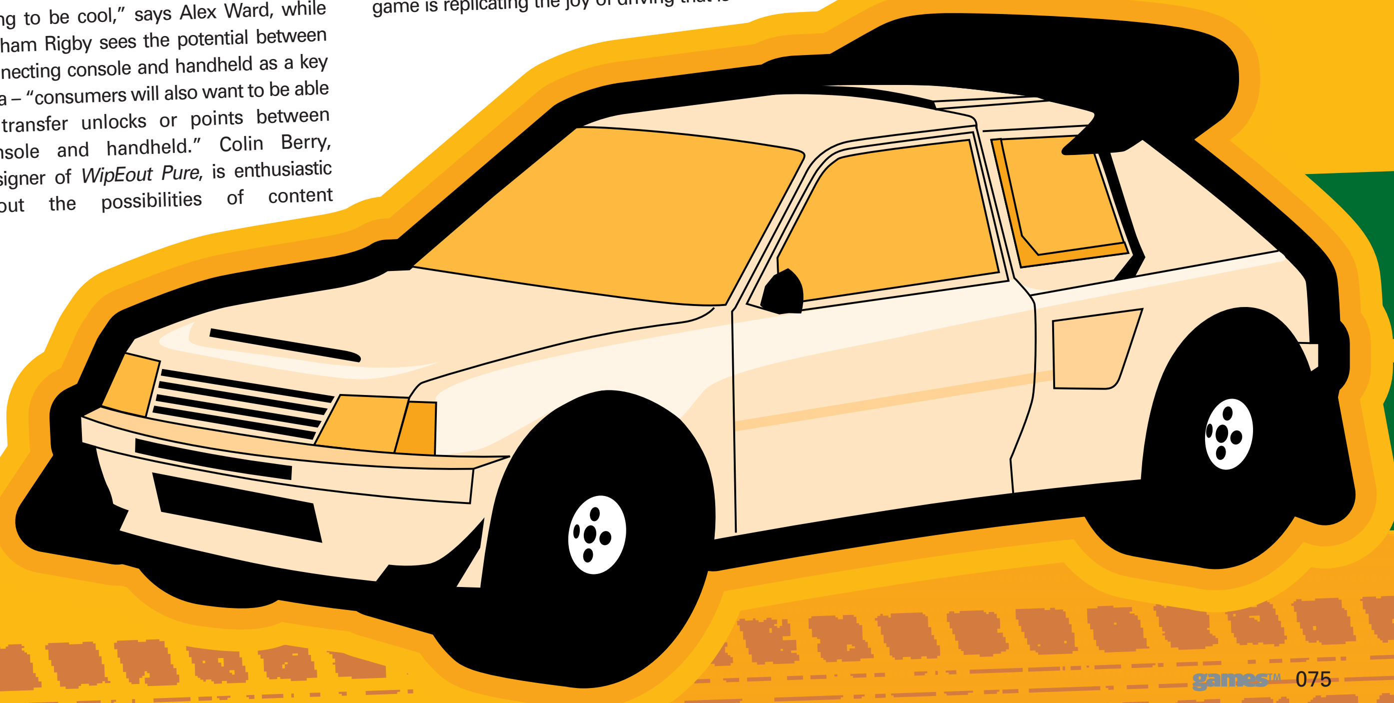
With racing sims billing themselves as being as close to real racing as possible, just how realistic are they? *Popular Science Magazine* in the US put this to the test, using *Forza Motorsport* on the Road America circuit. American GT racer Gunnar Jeannette and gamer RJ DeVera were both asked to play the circuit then drive the same cars around the real course. Surprisingly, the differences between the lap times in the game and out on the track were small – typically the subjects were a couple of seconds faster in the game. "The fear of real-life impact at 150mph is probably what prevented Gunnar and RJ from taking that same approach on the track [as in the game]," the article concluded.

Road To Somewhere

"The most important factor in a driving game is replicating the joy of driving that is felt within that sixtieth of a second," says Kazanori Yamauchi.

How far off we are from ultimately achieving this ideal remains to be seen, but as Ward reminds us, there are bound to be a few twists. "Ten years ago, who could have predicted the almost comatose state of F1 or rally games over here?" he asks. "Who could have predicted the dominance of titles such as *Need For Speed Underground*, selling seven or eight million copies around the world?"

But come what may, one thing's for sure – if the journey thus far is anything to go by, watching the fortunes of the driving game unfold will make for an interesting spectacle. Fasten your seatbelts and enjoy the ride.





The Players

IN AN INDUSTRY THAT USUALLY REVOLVES AROUND PR JARGON IT'S ALWAYS NICE TO MEET A STRAIGHT TALKER. CHRIS BEATRICE TELLS IT LIKE IT IS AND REMINDS US THAT LIFE ISN'T ANYTHING LIKE THE MOVIES…

CHRIS BEATRICE

TILTED MILL ENTERTAINMENT

It's doubtful that Chris Beatrice realised where he'd end up when he came out of art school and started work as an art director for a T-shirt company – videogames certainly didn't seem like an option. But after dabbling as an illustrator for the old *Legend* adventure games, and a nine-year stint at Sierra's Impression Games studio, he set up his own games company, Tilted Mill, in March last year where he's now president and director of development. Yet despite this seemingly effortless rise to greatness, Beatrice has a refreshingly sceptical – and realistic – view of the industry.

"None of us here have big egos," he explains. "We don't dress in black leather and wear sunglasses indoors, and we definitely don't make a big deal about hyping ourselves." This really couldn't be a more accurate statement. Tilted Mill could never be considered a high-profile studio, and although this is generally considered a disadvantage in the games industry, Chris remains adamant that a company should be judged on what it can achieve and not by hype.

"A lot of people in this industry are still taken in by this hype – and it's often their own," he says. "A lot of games get a lot of attention from journalists and business development people for all the wrong reasons. This is not the movie industry and never will be. Playing games requires too much of a time investment for your average person. That changes everything, but many industry professionals don't want to accept that. I imagine that this extends to journalists as well. It only takes two hours to review a movie. After that you've seen exactly what anyone else viewing the movie will see. Games just don't work that way. Yet reviewers still need to deal with insane deadlines, and often cannot fully play a game before they have to write it up. How can an in-depth strategy game get a fair shake in that environment?"

This negative view of the industry – particularly the possibly unfair reviews of RTS titles, Titled Mill's speciality – could normally be explained away by a developer upset at a run of bad reviews. But the fact that Tilted Mill's last title, *Immortal Cities: Children Of The Nile*, performed well across the board when it was released at the beginning of the year suggests that this isn't the case. *Children Of the Nile* is a project Chris is very pleased with and he's quick to explain how tough it was to create a title of such a high quality.

"That game was a challenge just about every step of the way," he recalls. "We needed to bring together three very difficult components in one game. It needed to look great, so the player felt completely immersed in the setting; it needed to have the same essential play dynamic as a city-building game; and needed to operate like a realistic sim, where the people in the game didn't do stupid things. In many ways these three goals are in conflict with one another, but the result of resolving these conflicts is what makes this game so unique."

It's unsurprising that this uniqueness pleases Chris so much. A quick glace at the titles that he's worked on lately reveals an obvious trend: *Pharoah*, *Lords Of Magic*, *Lords Of The Realm II* and *Caesar III*. RTS and resource collection make up the bulk of his work over recent years, a situation that's very different from his first job in the industry at Impression Software, a company that had brands covering education, sports, war and several others in the core strategy area. However, Beatrice is quick to point out that he feels that "It's much more important to be really, really good at doing one thing." Isn't he concerned that his creativity will be stifled if contained within the one genre for too long?

"Not at all," he replies. "Ask any game designer and he or she will tell you it's not hard at all to come up with original concepts. What's hard is getting those with the cash to believe in it enough to take a risk – and then developing those ideas is when the real work starts. You need to dive in, believe in the concept, fully embrace it and really hammer it out. This is exactly what we're doing with the title we are currently working on and, although I can't say anything specific about it, we are very excited and we know our fans will be too…"

Immortal Cities: Children Of The Nile is out now on PC and was reviewed in Issue 29.

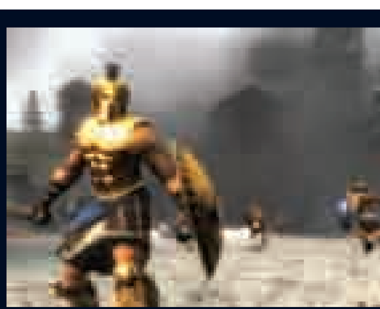
"MANY OF THOSE WHO CONTROL THE INDUSTRY ARE COMPLETELY OUT OF TOUCH WITH THOSE WHO SUSTAIN IT"
CHRIS BEATRICE

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH, WE HEAD TO SUNNY HORSHAM TO MEET THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY







THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY



ONE SMALL UK DEVELOPER HAS CONQUERED THE WORLD AGAIN AND AGAIN, ON THE PC AT LEAST. BUT NOW IT WANTS TO GIVE CONSOLE OWNERS THE CHANCE TO THROW THEIR WEIGHT AROUND. WE FIND OUT HOW…

There are few people who can claim to have taken over the world. Yet the guys at Creative Assembly have more than one reason to stake their claims on this ostentatious boast that would make any dictator or mad scientist green with envy. This is because their games, which encourage players to rule the most powerful dynasties on earth, have made the company one of the most respected PC developers ever. The *Total War* series has sold millions worldwide, and with a console game on the way courtesy of new owners Sega the world is looking increasingly like The Assembly's oyster…

Obviously, Creative Assembly is more than just a lucky development house that discovered the secrets of digital alchemy. A quick look at the CVs of two of the men in charge – founder and MD Tim Ansell, and development director Mike Simpson – reveals a staggering amount of industry experience spanning over two decades, and with that, an inherent knowledge that a company is only as strong as its employees. It should come as no surprise that they are always on the look out for new talent, as Simpson explains. "The wider the range of skills and talents in the



ASSEMBLED CREATIVES

1 MIKE SIMPSON, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

IN A NUTSHELL: Simpson spends most of his time working on the design and production of the *Total War* games. With over 20 years' industry experience (his first game being *Swords And Sorcery* on the Spectrum), he's a real asset to the CA team.

2 TIM ANSELL, FOUNDER AND MD

IN A NUTSHELL: Ansell has an impressive background to match Mike Simpson's, having worked for Mastertronic, FireBird and Psygnosis. He's even spent quality time with the Japan-only FMTowns system. He set up The Creative Assembly in 1987.

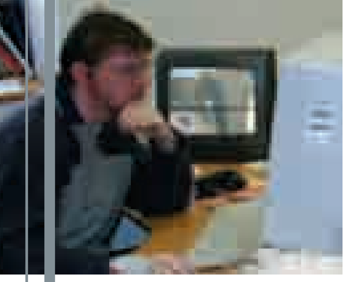
studic the better," he says. "We are always looking for talent and will take people with potential on even if there's no immediate need. We only recruit carefully which means everyone gets the pleasure of working with a talented, successful team."

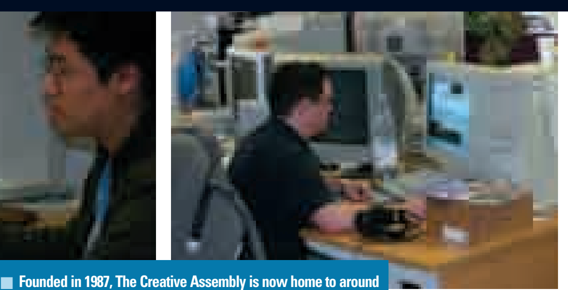
The team at the studio currently numbers around 75, though this number may be forced to rise as the staff face the challenges that arise from working on a new set of formats (the *Total War* series relied heavily on the hardware capabilities of the PC, as this allowed some serious number crunching during the larger scale battles). Chances are that Simpson and co will be keen to keep the recruitment to a bare minimum, as Creative Assembly sees itself as an elite team, preferring quality to quantity every time. "It's teams that are important rather than total size of the studio," says Simpson. "So long as you have self-contained teams, the management bandwidth to use them well, and good opportunities for them to exploit you can safely expand, but you have to avoid diluting the experience and talent you've built up too far." It's a very admirable ethos, and one that seems to be common among all today's greatest studios, many of whom have been giving similar answers in these very pages over the past couple of years.

However, it's those best suited to change that will be the real success stories in the modern games industry, and Simpson is well aware of this as he outlines his plans on how to deal with growth. "Expansion is best done by fission of existing teams rather than wholesale recruitment," he says. "The company culture has to be passed on to the new team, and having old friends in other teams helps inter-team co-operation. We're actually in a great

IT'S ALL GREEK

Creative Assembly's new game, *Spartan: Total Warrior* draws heavily on the Greek age of history, but the action-heavy gameplay takes some liberties as far as the historical accuracy goes.






Founded in 1987, The Creative Assembly is now home to around 70 staff in Horsham and Australia. Hmm, West Sussex or Oz…?




AS SEEN ON TV

Tim Ansell remained fairly quiet during most of the games™ grilling, but upon mentioning the studio's foray into television, he was eager to explain the company's five minutes of fame. "Our entry into the world of television came about when we were approached by three separate TV production companies, each of whom had an idea for a TV show which utilised our *Total War* engine. One of the shows went no further than a pilot but the other two became *Time Commanders* (the first series was shown in the UK on BBC2 in autumn 2003, the second series was shown in January this year) and *Decisive Battles* (shown in the US on the History Channel)." If you missed the programmes, it seems likely that they'll appear as endless repeats on the History Channel, or in some dark recess of the Sky digital broadcasting schedule.

position for future expansion now, with the average number of years of experience of our current staff being very high relative to most developers." He adds that "Fewer, better people really does work", and this is something that Sega is likely to encourage in its newest prize. When questioned about the buy-out, Simpson responds by noting that, "The plan is indeed to be 'independent'. Sega bought CA for its expertise in making great games. They have no desire to tinker with that. Their only desire is to help where help is actually helpful."

Whereas many see the buy-out by the former console manufacturer as a positive move, many have been quick to forget the recent critic-led backlash against EA's spending spree that has encompassed Digital Illusions, Criterion and the ESPN licence. Perhaps the public would rather see a different giant such as Sega pulling the strings, but over at Creative Assembly there is a distinct feeling of respect for Electronic Arts. Few people will be aware of the fact that the developer started life making EA Sports titles, before venturing out with *Shogun: Total War*. "The EA Sports work was bread-and-butter work for the company in the early days," says Simpson. "They were small teams, short projects, low risk, low return. It had the downside that any great success resulted in EA taking the franchise in-house. Creative Assembly did the first PC *FIFA*, as well as *Cricket* and *Rugby* games. They gave us the stability to be able to take on another genre without betting the company on it." This highlights the other side of the argument that surrounds EA, and anyone who sees the publisher as a force that can only harm the industry would be advised to take note of the stories behind

> "WE MAKE THE CORE OF OUR GAMES **FOR HARDCORE GAMERS** – I'M ONE OF THEM – AND THEN MAKE THEM **FUN AND ACCESSIBLE FOR EVERYONE ELSE**"
> MIKE SIMPSON, CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

Creative Assembly, LionHead, Oddworld Inhabitants and many other respected developers who are now on top of the world.

A solid foundation is always half the battle, but the success of any developer lies in the quality of its products and the way they're received by the public. This may seem obvious, but the way it's actually achieved is far from simple. Creative Assembly may have created one of the greatest RTS games of all time with *Shogun: Total War*, but as Simpson explains, the idea was stumbled upon rather than intentionally created. "The initial brief for *Shogun* was to make a traditional *C&C* clone. It was only when we got into it that it evolved first into mass battles, and then into full 3D. As the project went on the potential became clear, and we've only just begun to tap it." This is no shallow boast from a developer that has created three of the finest PC titles in existence. The new game, *Spartan: Total Warrior*, will undoubtedly take the series in a fresh direction, but as Simpson says, "I could spend more than one lifetime making games along (and beyond) these lines – no chance of the barrel running dry."



STEP BACK IN TIME

When it comes to the *Total War* series, Creative Assembly prides itself on its ability to create authentic characters and settings. This is done through extensive amounts of research and plenty of concept art to refine the exact look that it wants for the games.

This is great news for console owners who've been waiting for the *Total War* series (or a variation thereof) on their machines, and the promise of the bottomless barrel of creativity is something that will keep eyes firmly fixed on the game until it's finally released later this year. However, many might see the move to consoles as an inevitable dumbing-down of the series as we have seen so many times before. While there's no sure-fire way to determine how *Spartan* will turn out, it seems unlikely that a duff game will find its way past the quality control of the creative director.

Despite the ever-increasing demands of managing a premiere development house, Simpson is still in touch with the fan-base, noting that, "We spend a lot of time on the forums. The online and mod community is small from a commercial point of view but very vocal. We also have a huge single-player community who are equally passionate. We make the core of the game for all these hardcore gamers (I'm one of them), and then make it fun and accessible for everyone else. That gives us a core of deep, deep gameplay and all the accessibility and polish that the wider audience needs. The fans are part of the process now."

Whether or not PC owners welcome the news of *Spartan* remains to be seen. It's not here to spell an end to the *Total War* series as they know it, largely due to the tremendous critical acclaim for Creative Assembly's last project, *Rome: Total War*, which many saw as the best RTS title ever made. In fact, Simpson offers a sneak peak at the future of the series. "First off let me dispel the myth that we are in any way abandoning or changing in any way our *Total War* RTS games. We're absolutely not. We currently have not one, but two PC strategy titles in development right now although we won't announce any more details on these for some time yet. And all of the original team that worked on *Rome: Total War* are continuing to work on them".

This will come as encouraging news, and Simpson adds, "The outstanding response in all the reviews is something the whole team is immensely proud of. We still get a buzz when a new review gets posted up or a new award or nomination is lobbed our way. We find it hard to believe given all the things we wanted to do in *Rome* but didn't have time for. They'll just have to wait for the next one…" This enigmatic reference is made about the new *Total Warrior* game, which the studio is keen to stress is completely separate from the *Total War* series.

With the Sega buy-out complete and a string of future releases lined up there can be no doubt that The Creative Assembly's position is growing stronger by the day. Perhaps, one day, the company really will have the whole world in its digital pocket.

CREATIVE PROCESS

FIFA [1993, PC]

This is how The Creative Assembly started out its life. Porting Electronic Arts' famous franchise over to the PC helped to establish the developer and bring in some much needed cash to help it grow as a company. Luckily, it left behind the *FIFA* franchise before we got to *FIFA Street*…



SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR [2000, PC]

The game that turned it around for Creative Assembly was PC strategy title *Shogun: Total War*. Receiving almost unanimous critical acclaim and proving a hit with gamers, it paved the way for mission packs and new games galore, including *Medieval* and *Rome: Total War*.



SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR [2005, PS2/XBOX/GC]

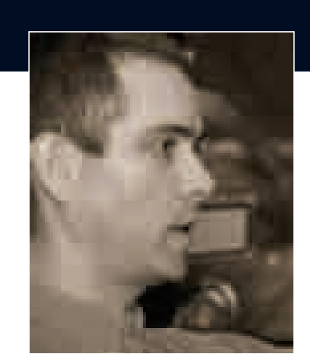
The latest title to emerge from the studios of Creative Assembly, this foray into the console world won't see shop shelves until September at the earliest. Can *Total War* make it outside the PC? It's looking good so far.



"YOU MAKE THE GREATEST GAMES IN THE WORD ONLY BY HIRING PEOPLE WHO ARE TRULY PASSIONATE"

JEFF STRAIN





The Players

IT TAKES GUTS TO LEAVE A REPUTABLE COMPANY AND START OVER WITH YOUR OWN IDEAS. JEFF STRAIN, CO-FOUNDER OF ARENANET, DID JUST THAT. AND NOW HE WANTS TO CHANGE THE WAY WE PLAY ONLINE…

JEFF STRAIN
ARENANET

Imagine the scene: you're hard at work developing some of the most talked-about titles in the massively multiplayer online role-playing category when you decide that the genre could be taken down a different path. A path that would allow everyone to enjoy it, not just those who have heaving great holes in their not-so-busy schedules.

Okay, it might not have gone exactly like that, but after working on reputable titles such as *StarCraft* and *World Of Warcraft*, this is exactly what Jeff Strain did in the spring of 2000 when he and fellow Blizzard employees Mike O'Brian and Patrick Wyatt founded ArenaNet with a view to providing an innovative online gaming experience.

"The whole reason we wanted to start ArenaNet was to try some different things with online games," says Strain. "We felt that the massively multiplayer online genre in particular was stuck in a rut, that everyone was just revolving around a few core ideas that were laid down five years ago by games like *EverQuest*. We really felt like the technology could give us a way to bring the cool social dynamics of online games to a much broader audience."

It may be easy to say, but reshaping an entire genre to make it appeal to those not easily lured into an online world is no simple task and ArenaNet will have to have a fair few aces up its sleeve if it wants to succeed. Strain is clearly aware of this, yet his smile suggests that he's confident in his company's ability to deliver…

"We think that being able to take some chances with design is our greatest advantage. Being a new company with no past successes to build upon has put us in a position to be more creative," he says. "One of the interesting things about our development team is that everyone is very into console games – we love the immediacy. Our plan has always been to make a game that had the depth of a really intense MMORPG or RTS but could be picked up and played for ten minutes before dinner and still feel like something had been achieved. It's our belief that rather than having to spend your time preparing to have fun, you should actually be having fun."

This way of thinking is has obviously greatly affected the way ArenaNet's first title, *Guild War*s, has turned out, and Strain is quick to point out that the game shouldn't be labelled as an MMORPG. You can easily see why people would make this assumption – at a glace the title seems very similar to many massively multiplayer online RPGs and it certainly uses much of the same technology. However, the MMORPG tag suggests a certain type of game design and it's this design that ArenaNet has attempted to steer away from. Rather than your abilities and strengths being largely determined by the number of hours you've put in, *Guild Wars* has been heavily based on Magic: The Gathering – a card game where the more cards you have, the more strategic options become available to you. The twist is, this doesn't necessarily make you a better player.

"We made sure that *Guild Wars* was designed from day one as a game that rewards skill and not just the amount of time you have to put into the game," Strain explains. "If you've been playing for ten hours and I've been playing for a 100 then, if you're the better thinker, it's very possible that you'll beat me. We also feel this improves the co-op elements; it becomes very difficult if one member of a team has more time to spend on the game than another. When this happens you get members that become higher levels quicker and get to do things that others may never do. This is a huge downside to MMO games and means the game loses appeal very quickly. Our system allows us to avoid this element as well."

So what's next for Strain and ArenaNet once *Guild Wars* has hit the shelves? A well-deserved holiday perhaps? "*Guild Wars Chapter 1*, *Guild Wars Chapter 2* and then probably *Guild Wars Chapter 3*," he says with a smile. "There'll be no rest for us. We always want our players to believe that there's a future in what they're spending time on – that's very important to us."

Guild Wars is out on 28 April and was previewed in issue 24.



The combat gets up close and personal with *Unreal Championship*'s new melee attacks, but have they made a good game great?

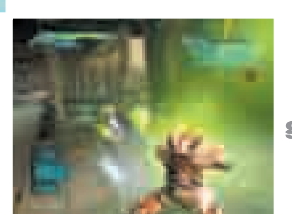
Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict 86



REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, games™ is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad we'll make sure you know, if it's great we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2: THE LIANDRI CONFLICT

A GAME OF TWO HALVES

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
Epic Games

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

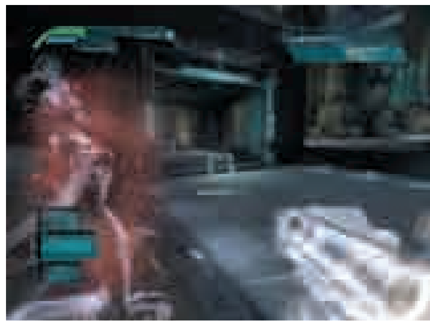
While the first-person shooter genre is oversubscribed and bursting at the seams, it's hard to think of many FPSs that manage to captivate both the single- and multiplayer audiences. *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict* is not one of those few. While it can host frantic skirmishes online with the usual array of multiplayer FPS modes (Capture The Flag and so on), playing the same game offline is an empty, depressing state of affairs.

The emphasis on human-versus-bot combat means the artificial intelligence needs to be up to scratch and it is, only to the point where deathmatches feel unnecessarily stacked against you. It's no fun going up against bots who can kill you from a distance with sniper rifle headshots while their back is turned. Nor is it any fun having your own sniper rifle headshots reflected back at you with alarming regularity. Online, such occurrences are forgiveable because you know you've come up against a better player and in any case, such instances are rare. When it's the harsh AI at the root of the instant kills, it simply feels unfair.

There is a storyline to follow but this is little more than an excuse to send your character, Anubis, into battle against other bots with slight variations on the level requirements: kill these two bots ten times, kill these characters 50 times before your rival, kill your rival 20 times… No matter what the level or the cut-scene preceeding it, the general theme is 'kill them before they kill you' with an arbitrary number padding out the length of each challenge and stretching your patience to breaking point.

The inclusion of Adrenaline moves to keep things fresh fails in single-player simply because it's impossible to tell how AI will react – Ethereal disables any target that locks on to you but the other bots are so unnervingly accurate that it's hard to tell if it's having any effect or not. In an interesting spin on traditional FPS gameplay,





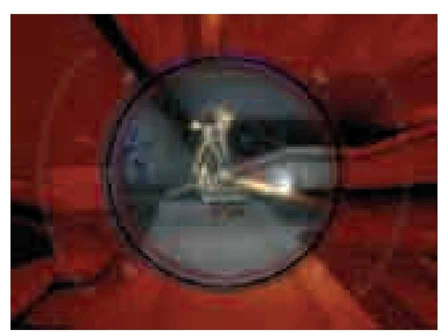
Lauren, being a lady, is weak but speedy. As all gaming ladies are.

You could fight him mano-a-mano, but it's safer hiding behind a gun.





Abandon your guns for some one-on-one melee scrapping.



Malcolm. Hardly a name to inspire terror and bloodlust…

melee attacks now hold much more weight than is usually expected in this run 'n' gun genre. You can put your guns away to switch to a close-up weapon (even a third-person view if it suits you) and do combat that way. By doing this, you're sacrificing the long-distance safety of gunplay in favour of more powerful melee attacks – it's a clever balance between reward and risk.

As you can't use guns and melee attacks at the same time, you're forced into certain styles of play but this limitation works for *Unreal Championship 2* rather than against it, as you soon favour certain Adrenaline moves, characters and weapons (you can only pick two from eight before heading into the deathmatch arena). While the gunplay is still an enjoyable mess of jumping and circle strafing, there is at least some forethought to proceedings in the choices you make. Fatalities are also available – a series of close-up button presses when your opponent has been 'frozen' – but they feel superficial and tacked on, jarring with the fluency of the melee combat itself.

Between the melee attacks and the Adrenaline moves, there are already enough tools to if not reinvent, at least renovate the FPS genre so it feels fresh once more. This rings true when you're up against human players and the sense of outsmarting them with an Ethereal move as you sneak into their base, or use Blade Burst to double your melee power, can be satisfying. This also lends itself nicely to the various play modes *The Liandri Conflict* offers, so while deathmatches are about stamina and brute strength, Capture The Flag favours agile characters who keep other players at a distance with accurate gunfire.



games™ GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

TO THE DEATH: Deathmatches seem the same as usual at first until you discover the melee attacks.
FLAG GET: Capture The Flag is given a new spin due to the variety of characters and Adrenaline moves.

Apart from the odd moment when *Unreal 2* chugs to a halt as someone joins the game, it's a pleasingly lag-free experience so there's nothing to tarnish the frantic, slick pace of the shooting. All that separates the on- and offline components of *The Liandri Conflict* is the quality of the opposition, yet as the challenges aren't strong enough to paper over the offline cracks, it's enough to split this FPS right down the middle. Almost every game with a heavy skew towards Xbox Live ends up as little more than an elaborate training ground for whenever you decide to take the fight online and *Unreal Championship 2* is no different.

There are too many AI quirks and tics to make offline play a useful or even enjoyable tool for learning the ropes, so despite some promising advances, *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict* is just another game to file under the 'buy it if you have Xbox Live' sub-division of the FPS genre.



VERDICT 6/10
ONLY WORTH IT IF YOU HAVE XBOX LIVE

DOUBLE JUMP!

Usually the staple of platform games and coin collectors, the humble double jump (two normal jumps, no somersault) has made it into *Unreal Championship 2*. Together with wall-jumping and the default Nimble and Speed Adrenaline moves for each character, this move should turn the arenas into 3D environments to use to your advantage instead of the usual 2D-with-jumping platforms. It's a cute idea except it's too easy to be gunned down mid-flight when in the air, as you slowly float back down to the ground. It doesn't help that you're never quite confident enough with the wall-jump either, thanks to the erratic collision detection. The combination of these factors means you'll immediately abandon any wall-scaling thoughts at even the slightest hint of danger, preferring to fight your battles on solid ground instead. A clever idea, then, but ultimately a redundant one.

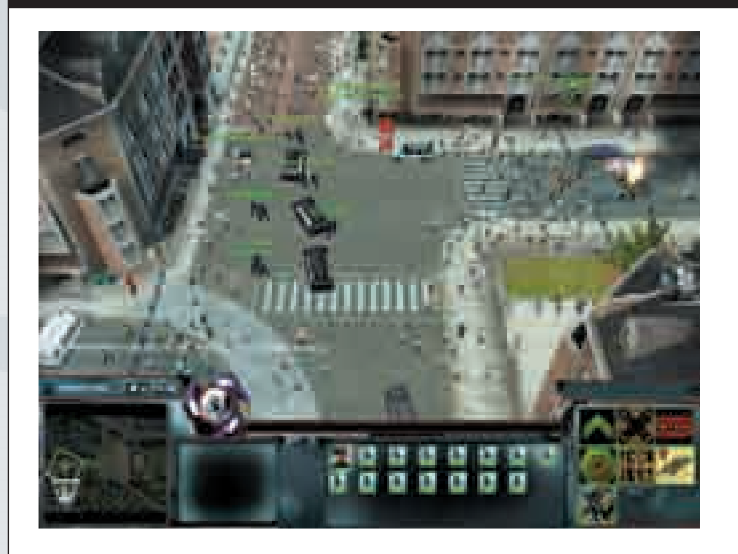
FAQs

Q. BALANCED?
In theory, gunplay and melee attacks balance each other out, but melee attacks are definitely proving more popular.

Q. MELEE MORE POWERFUL?
Not necessarily. Melee just has more options for dealing with gunfire and other melee attacks.

Q. CHEAP?
Not really but it's always a good word to shout at other players when you lose.







DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Atari

DEVELOPER
Eugen Systems

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

MINIMUM SPEC
1.5GHz processor, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb graphics card

ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION

OLD LOOKS, OLD STORY, NEW GAMEPLAY

There's a lot of guff spoken about first impressions lasting longest. If that was so, then anyone taking a look at *Act Of War* would think it was merely a *Command & Conquer* clone. But scratch the surface and real-time strategy gamers will find one of the best RTS releases of recent years.

All the usual cliches are here to please RTS fans: the 'Commies take over the world' plot, the dodgy FMV acting, the colourful – almost cartoon-like – visuals, the resource gathering…. However, start playing and the gameplay reveals itself to be bang up to date. The basics are straightforward and are streamlined enough to make it fairly easy to get cracking. Base-building is automated to a certain degree, with key structures often already in place. Resource gathering involves drilling for oil and taking it to a refinery (luckily, the two are always close together), seizing financial institutions (and then defending them from attack) and – most ingeniously – taking enemy troops prisoner.

These troops will belong to one of the three sides in the game (one of which is only available in multiplayer), and all factions are reasonably well balanced with the paper-scissors-stone approach to units ensuring that everything can be beaten with the right combination. However, this works best in multiplayer where all sides are likely to build a fairly well-balanced assault force. In the single-player missions (there are over 30 chapters) the computer tends to build forces that rely heavily on only one or two key units; as a result, the player needs to do the same. Get it right, and an easy victory is assured; get it

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Although the storyline in *Act Of War* is not exactly the most original, it does allow for some of the world's biggest cities to be used as backdrops to the battle. Buckingham Palace, the White House and the Golden Gate Bridge all provide settings for various levels. The action can be zoomed in to see the battle being raged on the streets, or pulled right back to enable an overview of the battlefield. Despite a modern twist, the visuals are instantly reminiscent of *Command & Conquer* and this 'retro-modern' feel is clearly something that developer Eugen Systems has actively sought to achieve – and it works exceedingly well.



The tactics aren't too advanced, but rushing tanks with infantry? Forget it.



FINGERPRINT

games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

AMBUSH: Hide your soldiers in undergrowth or buildings. Buildings stand up to tanks better, mind.

MONEY: Taking prisoners of war generates extra cash. A nice little earner…

FAQs

Q. WILL WE SEE THIS ON CONSOLES?
Don't be daft. RTS games rarely work on consoles, and this is a PC exclusive.

Q. THE EXPLOSIONS ARE GOOD, AREN'T THEY?
No, they're awesome. Wait until you bomb the snot out of the White House (it's been over-run by terrorists, sadly).

Q. I DIDN'T LIKE C&C. WILL I LIKE THIS?
Almost certainly not. *Act Of War* boasts some originality, but not enough to change your opinion of the genre.

The explosions in the game are a joy to behold.

wrong, and the computer will crush you with ease. Over time, it becomes second nature to send out a reconnaissance force to see what the enemy is up to and building a suitable army to destroy them. This doesn't spoil the gameplay too much; this sophisticated AI flaw is one common to pretty much every strategy game under the sun and it's not sufficiently bad here to detract from the fun.

Things are made more enjoyable by excellent level design. Missions are set in real-life locations ranging from the heavily urbanised (London and Washington) to the sparse (Egyptian desert). This leads to different tactics being deployed, and there are enough versatile units to cover every situation. More of a problem are some frustrating interface difficulties. Again, they don't ruin the game, but they do prevent a decent title becoming a great one. Controlling large groups of units can be troublesome, even when using hot keys to differentiate between them, and it's often easier to resort to the time-honoured method of pointing every on-screen unit at the enemy, then sitting back to watch the carnage unfold.

One great touch is the chance to set up ambushes, which are particularly useful in urban areas. Setting a group of foot soldiers as an ambush will double their firepower (due to the security of their ensconced position) and ensure that anyone who blunders within range will suffer pretty heavy losses. This can hold up the advance of an invading force long enough for the defending side to generate a big enough group to defend its base, and often prove an invaluable defensive tool. Offensively, air strikes are a particular favourite too.



Yeah, that is the White House. Is this a concerned face?

This is partly down to the fact that they're not as devastating as they are in other games, acting more as a 'softener' to precede an infantry charge.

Graphics and sound are solid if unspectacular – there's little slowdown even with plenty of units on screen and the explosions are suitably satisfying – but this isn't the sort of game that's selling itself on visceral thrills. What it *is* selling itself on is challenging and entertaining strategy gaming, a strong single-player game and an entertaining online experience. And it has these in abundance. Will it make you rethink how you see strategy games? Don't be daft. Will you enjoy playing it? Almost certainly. Now if you'll excuse us, we're off to tank rush the White House.



VERDICT 7/10

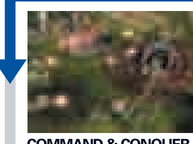
WON'T CHANGE THE WORLD, BUT LETS YOU SAVE IT

ARMIES OF EXIGO



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



COMMAND & CONQUER

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Hip Games

DEVELOPER
Digital Extremes

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
5 May

PLAYERS
1 (1-16 Online)



PARIAH

THE DOCTOR IS DEFINITELY IN

CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

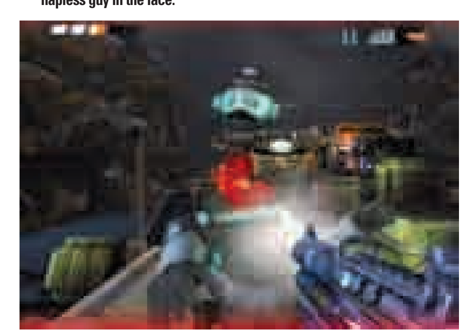
MAKE-UP: Unlike *TimeSplitters'* box-structured MapMaker, *Pariah's* has more scope for creativity – you can raise and lower land, change textures, insert objects and more, all through a simple interface.

From the moment it was announced, *Pariah* had a lot of expectations to live up to. That was largely the fault of Digital Extremes on two counts – not just its deserved reputation built up through the development of the *Unreal* series, but also the rather exquisite screenshots that were released with the game's announcement. As full of lush and verdant landscapes as it was packed with gun-toting maniacs, *Pariah* was to be the game that Digital Extremes had wanted to make for years; the game that would finally help it escape the shade of the *Unreal* parasol; the game to redefine the concept of the single-player FPS while also offering a multiplayer game befitting its *Unreal* roots.

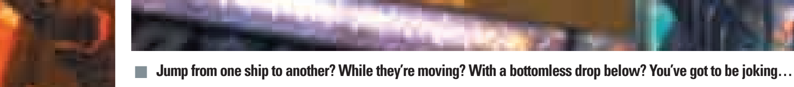
That things haven't quite played out as was hoped, then, should be seen as something of a disappointment for those expecting *Pariah* to be a work of FPS art, but this certainly isn't a dud. It's solid, yes, but it's also riddled with inconsistencies and annoyances. It's visually pleasing in some places, but also manages to look bland and murky in others. Some of its levels will have you grinning with delight at their little quirks, while others drive home a distinct feeling of linearity and ennui. In short, *Pariah* has as many flaws as it does inspired touches, but at least the result is a reasonable effort compared to some of the more lacklustre examples of the genre that have appeared recently.

To its credit, Digital Extremes has at least played to its strengths as a developer when it comes to many elements of *Pariah*, not least the enemy AI that, for the most part, is as cunning as a pump-action shotgun loaded with weasels. And we're not just talking about your usual 'clever' AI here as with something like *Halo 2*; the opposition in *Pariah* can be genuinely intimidating at times if you're not expecting it. Taking cover behind anything to hand, checking that the coast is clear before moving forwards, creating flanking positions, retreating if you start laying down heavy fire, moving its light-armed troops to the front while those with more considerable firepower hang back and barrage you… it's enough to create a real thrill of danger on more than a few occasions. Unfortunately, it's also the source of some of the contradictions we mentioned. Groups of troops failing to scatter despite you picking them off one by one with a sniper rifle, lone soldiers standing stock still while you walk right up to them and deliver a blast to the head, even enemies

You get to shoot a guard's helmet off before blasting the hapless guy in the face.







Jump from one ship to another? While they're moving? With a bottomless drop below? You've got to be joking…



You don't get to ride around much in *Pariah*, although the flimsiness of the vehicles makes that a good thing.

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
In single-player, you can beat the 18 levels fairly quickly (we did it in two afternoons). The multiplayer, however, is solid enough to last for a while.

Q. WEAPONS?
All pretty meaty, although you'll find some more appealing than others – heat-seeking rockets and grenades can make a hell of a mess.

Q. STORY?
Quite absorbing, even if some of the cut-scenes make the glassy-eyed Mason look like he's got a metal rod inserted where it shouldn't be.

DOOM 3



AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN



HALF-LIFE 2

blowing themselves up by shooting scenery right in front of them with a rocket launcher… it doesn't happen that often, but it degrades all the good work done by the rest of the AI when it does.

The level design, too, boasts its own mixture of delights and disappointments, although it's the former that prevails. Levels that appear to crib from *Unreal Championship*'s Assault mode are among the most pleasing – moving through a high-speed train or leaping between drop-ships mid-flight while taking out enemies is exciting to say the least. However, the fact that some stages suffer from overly-linear paths and that you have to backtrack to activate switches or explore rooms that were previously off-limits just because the game said so gets a little tiresome, especially since some of the nature-styled areas can suffer from muddy textures and a lack of definition.

Thankfully, the satisfying range of arms goes some way to keeping you busy enough to ignore this. Each weapon is upgradeable to increase the level of mayhem; plenty of smile-inducing deaths await through the use of manually detonated grenades, quad-warhead rockets and the vision-enhanced sniper rifle – proof that the combined might of the *Unreal* engine and Havok physics can be most effective in the right hands.

For its first real attempt at a 'proper' single-player FPS (as opposed to the team-based frivolities that were *Unreal Tournament*'s single-player antics), Digital Extremes should be reasonably proud of *Pariah*, even though it falls short of being the be all and end all of the genre that the developer claimed it would be. Something about the atmosphere and story-telling just feels right, in the same way that *Halo 2*'s gameplay (ending, or lack thereof, excepted) clicks for all the right reasons. True, it has flaws – flaws that will see you rolling your eyes, tutting loudly or even cursing for want of a way to express your concern – but the fact that the game still plays out rather enjoyably through to its twist-filled conclusion is at least some compensation for having to experience them. Not so much a great game, then, as a solid enough stepping stone to greater things. So long as Digital Extremes learns its lessons, its next project really could be the one.

VERDICT 7/10

ENOUGH TO KEEP LONE AND LIVE-HUNGRY PLAYERS BUSY

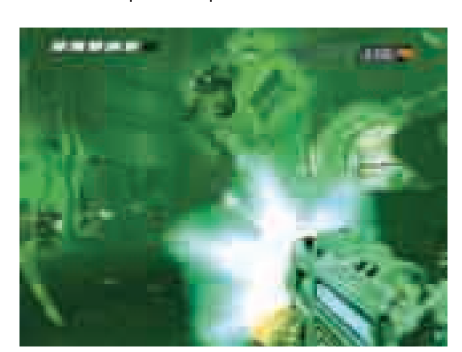
FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

Thankfully, Digital Extremes hasn't completely forgotten its *Unreal* past – something that you can tell from experiencing *Pariah*'s multiplayer elements. Using enclosed versions of single-player maps across a variety of environments, the modes available all play like traditional *Unreal Tournament* games, from the standard Deathmatch and Capture The Flag to Front Line Assault (which is incredibly similar to *UT*'s Onslaught mode) and the defender/attacker game that is Siege. That the whole thing plays like an expanded *UT* is also good, although the decision to allow players the choice of which two guns they use, not to mention the option to upgrade them mid-battle, is something that makes things even more interesting.

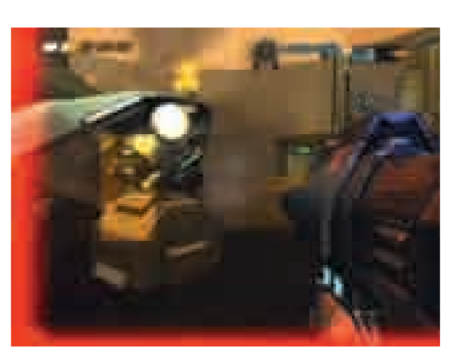
PC £29.99



Some slightly sharper textures aside, the only real difference for PC players is that those with *Unreal Tournament* experience will instantly feel at home with *Pariah*'s stylings.



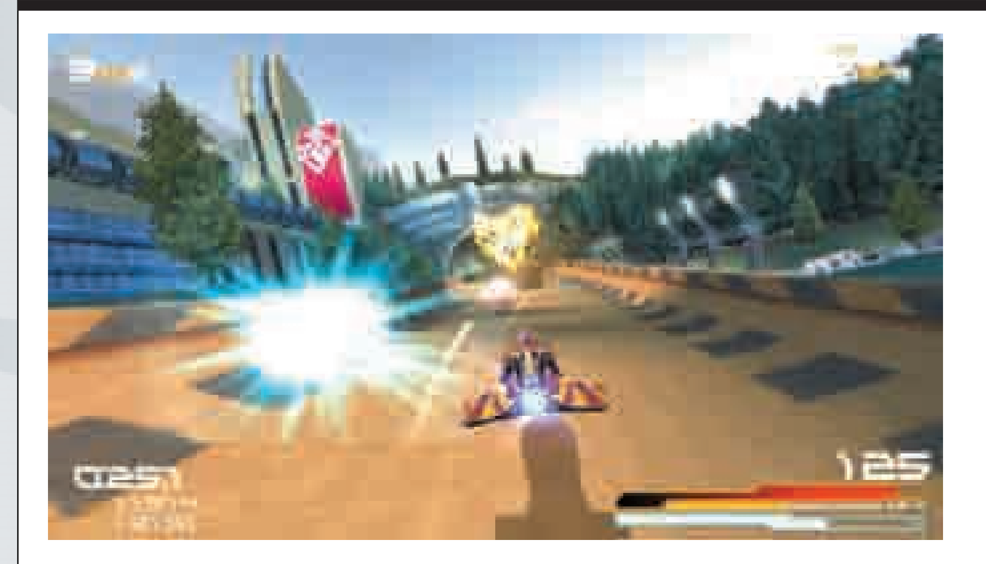
Plasma Guns are great for clearing a room, but eat up ammunition.



The AI fluctuates between scarily smart and irritatingly dumb.



The upgraded Sniper Rifle makes life a little easier.







DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
TBC (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1 (2-8 Online/via Wi-Fi)

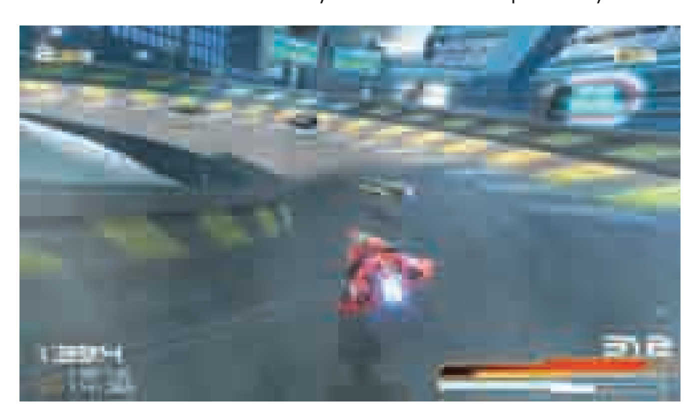
MAKING EYES BLEED SINCE 1995

WIPEOUT PURE

By and large, forums are rubbish. Browse most any gaming forum and if there's one thing you can't seem to get away from, it's 'my dad's bigger than your dad' arguments. You know the kind – things like 'PSP rox cos it has *GTA*, DS is for kids' countered by similarly unintelligible responses that seem to be about how the PSP is 'only about grafficks' while Nintendo is deemed 'teh most innovativest' by a guy calling himself Mario1337. But while we've seen a slew of original and universally enjoyable concepts rock the DS already, how the myth of the PSP being purely graphics-centric still exists outside the most rabid of fanboy circles is beyond us. Your Honour, presenting Exhibit J: *WipEout Pure*.

Visually, stylistically and technically, *Pure* is nothing short of breathtaking. If the guy sat behind you on the bus doesn't peer over your shoulder in a slightly creepy manner while you're tearing through the skies of Sol 2, you can pretty much assume he's blind – that kind of breathtaking. From basic environments and craft to weapon and environmental effects, *Pure* is quite the visual smorgasbord; if the first wave of PSP titles can be this beautiful, hopes are certainly high for what is to come over the next couple of years. But such remarkable good looks don't come without a price. It's not a hefty one, admittedly, but certain courses can cause the action to stutter slightly – not exactly ideal when split-second timing is called for. To be honest, we've not found this to be massively detrimental to gameplay (if at all) but those wishing for the silky smoothness of something like *Ridge Racer* might feel a little hard done by.

Far more crucial to the high-speed shenanigans, however, is the control, and thanks to the PSP's already familiar features this



It's all about learning how to use the air brakes with each craft. Then you can race like a demon.



Weapons can either be used for their designated purposes or absorbed to repair some of your ship's damage.



As you progress, the weapons heirarchy shifts like crazy – the shield is absolutely invaluable in the later races. Plasma, on the other hand…

handles just as well as *WipEout* ever has. Shoulder buttons function wonderfully as air brakes and it just feels like the machine was invented solely to play this game – score one to Sony. Both the D-pad and analogue nub offer great control over the various craft once you get back into the *WipEout* mindset. If you opt for the latter, though, using the left air brake can be a touch uncomfortable unless you've got what *FIFA Street*'s resident cretin MC Harvey would call "massive hands".

Basic progression though Tournament mode is just that. The four Alpha courses let you get your anti-gravity legs in preparation for the decidedly twistier Beta quartet; once that's done, only the Ascension tourney – a grueling slog through all eight tracks in sequence – stands between you and the next class. Score enough Gold medals along the way and you'll eventually be treated to four classic courses revamped especially for *Pure*. These make up the Classic tournament, another chance for you to show your skills on tracks that you may just remember (if you recognise them after Sony's retro chic makeover job, that is).

WipEout titles don't have a history of being the easiest of games and *Pure* does nothing to buck this trend. As you move up through the ever-speedier classes, you become far more reliant on Jedi reflexes, course knowledge and, should the worst happen, a bit of luck in getting a Quake or similarly devastating power-up to get you back in the top three. *Fusion* favourite Zone mode returns to push your skills to breaking point – your craft accelerates automatically and gains speed until you bottle it and turn billions of pounds worth of hover-racing contraption into burning scrap. Predictably, demands made on the player here are through the roof and you'll need all the commitment you can muster to earn anything above a Bronze on any of the four Zone courses. But with the relatively small number of courses on offer in general, learning the twists and turns of each is no great hassle. Adapting to the way you need to approach each one as you progress through the classes, though, that's another matter entirely…

WipEout Pure is another stunning must-have PSP title and perfectly highlights the differences between Sony and Nintendo's approach to next-gen handheld gaming. While most DS titles to date rely on original play mechanics and often feel like glorified mini-games (albeit addictive and enjoyable ones, in many cases), the PSP continues to receive titles with the familiarity, depth and polish of home console releases. In a way, this isn't overly surprising – Sony's only experience of gaming lies in the home, after all, and it'll be interesting to see whether it's this close-to-home approach or Nintendo's more ambitious route that wins the day in the West once both formats are properly established. Regardless, Sony cordially invites you to throw several clocks worth of retina-ruining hours into *Pure*, and unless you're slightly wrong in the head, you're allergic to fun or perhaps you lost your patience gland in a childhood accident, it's an offer you'd be a damn fool to refuse.



VERDICT 8/10

EVERYTHING IT COULD AND SHOULD BE



UPSIDE: DOWNLOADS

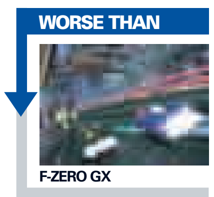
While the relatively meagre track selection might put some people off, we're assured that *WipEout Pure* will be one of the first PSP titles to receive downloadable content via Wi-Fi internet. Indeed, the online option sits teasingly on the main menu, getting our poor little minds racing (no pun intended) as to just what could be up for grabs. New courses seem to be a given but there's potential galore here – fresh tunes, craft and leagues could easily be provided for download to a Memory Stick Duo and integrated into the game. If only that custom soundtrack option had made the finished game…

WIPEOUT FUSION



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



F-ZERO GX

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY TRACKS?
A modest 12 courses occupy the UMD but each one is absolutely stunning.

Q. GREAT TUNES?
It wouldn't be *WipEout* without them. Aphex Twin through Freq Nasty – the soundtrack is fantastic.

Q. 60FPS?
Get out of town. *Pure* skirts around the 30 mark – anyone who wants a handheld racer to run at 60fps needs their head looking at…



TRACKMANIA SUNRISE

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

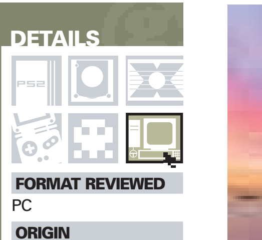
games™ **ENHANCED**

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MODE MAYHEM: Crazy and Platform modes join existing options Puzzle and Race.

MY EYES!: *TrackMania* obviously wasn't fast enough so *Sunrise* is significantly speedier.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
France

PUBLISHER
Digital Jesters

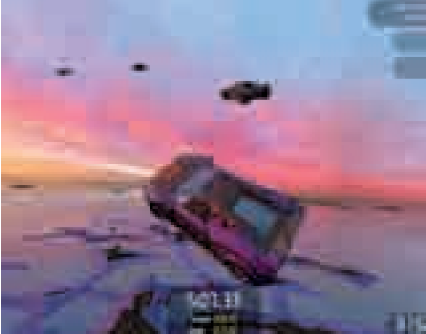
DEVELOPER
Nadeo

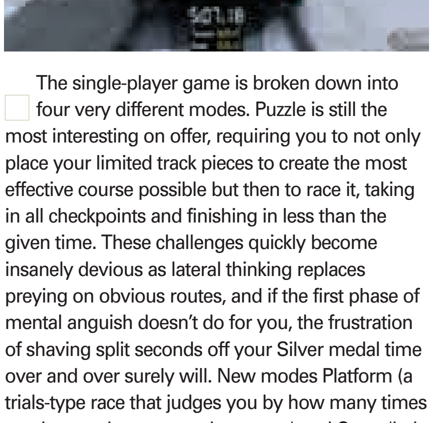
PRICE
£29.99

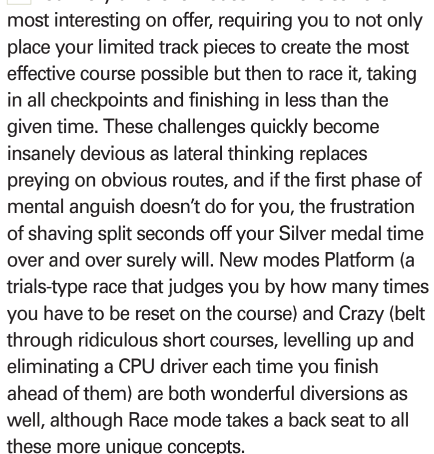
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (1-TBC online)

MINIMUM SPEC
Windows 98/2000/ME/XP, Pentium II 450, 64Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D graphics card, DirectX9-compatible sound card

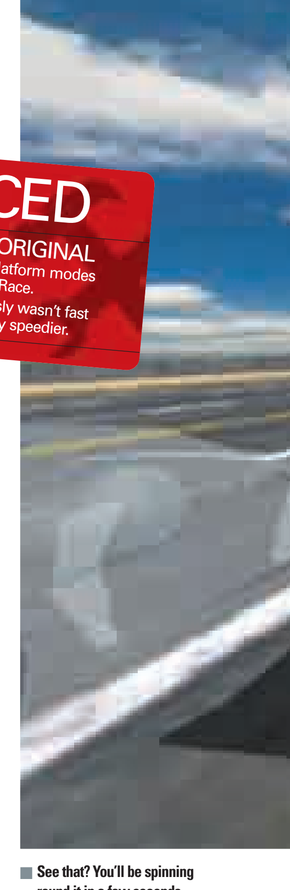






What exactly do you look for in a sequel? If the string of *Dynasty Warriors* follow-ups are anything to go by, much of the world is happy to settle for a large serving of 'more of the same' (perhaps ever-so-slightly improved, if you're lucky) but there's always a few sequels that refuse to rest on their laurels. The leap from *Burnout 2* to *Burnout 3: Takedown*, for example, was more or less as distant from the idea of rehashing the same idea as you can get, and it looks as though Nadeo wants *TrackMania* to enjoy a similar renaissance. From a simple, budget-feel puzzle racer, *Sunrise* has evolved into a polished and substantial title, and from relatively humble roots comes a driving game with a vivid imagination, a love of speed and a good knowledge of exactly how to wind the player up. You have been warned.

The single-player game is broken down into four very different modes. Puzzle is still the most interesting on offer, requiring you to not only place your limited track pieces to create the most effective course possible but then to race it, taking in all checkpoints and finishing in less than the given time. These challenges quickly become insanely devious as lateral thinking replaces preying on obvious routes, and if the first phase of mental anguish doesn't do for you, the frustration of shaving split seconds off your Silver medal time over and over surely will. New modes Platform (a trials-type race that judges you by how many times you have to be reset on the course) and Crazy (belt through ridiculous short courses, levelling up and eliminating a CPU driver each time you finish ahead of them) are both wonderful diversions as well, although Race mode takes a back seat to all these more unique concepts.



See that? You'll be spinning round it in a few seconds. Sickbags at the ready…



Get in the cage and you'll have to perform a 'wall of death' stunt to escape.



FAQs

Q. HOW FAST IS IT?
Silly fast. Better make sure your PC can keep up, although it shouldn't be too power-thirsty.

Q. DIFFICULT?
Hell yeah. Getting Gold on many of the levels can be a real chore.

Q. DO YOU NEED A WHEEL?
Hell no. We'd recommend a controller of some sort unless you enjoy getting hand cramp, though.



Unfortunately, there's one main problem that runs through pretty much every mode and it's one of difficulty. Gold medals are often needed to progress to a new series of challenges, but without gorging yourself on luck and skill prior to taking on one of the many tasks you'll likely end up with Silver at best. Racing and Puzzle medal times are easily the harshest – Platform simply (well, we say simply) requires you to complete a course without error. Perseverance is order of the day as you find yourself reaching for the Enter key to reset your car back on the track for the hundredth time but, bizarrely, it's not nearly as frustrating as it probably should be.

It's not just the content that has evolved far beyond that of the previous title, either. While *TrackMania* was clearly built for functionality, *Sunrise* is a far showier affair and the combination of sleek, solid visuals and a pace that shames even *Burnout* and *F-Zero* does Nadeo proud. Vehicles, while few in number, handle noticeably differently and once you're done spraying your cars with your own unique paint jobs, you'll quickly get a feel for them. It's pretty apparent that the stiffer control of one of the cars is an intentional move to ramp the difficulty even more. Yes, it's evil but once you learn to brake and corner early (obscene concepts for much of the game), most challenges become that little bit less, well, challenging.

But regardless of how many races, puzzles, cars and tracks are on the disc, it'll be the online community that makes or breaks *Sunrise*. Given the way support for the first game surpassed even the developer's expectations, we'd be inclined to think that this superior sequel should have no trouble in getting fans to rally behind it, and by the time you read this we'd wager the first user-made tracks, skins and challenges will already be freely available. It's this community freedom that could grant *Sunrise* life eternal, and given the sickeningly evil maps we've been cooking up, the mind truly boggles as to what the internet's more sadistic residents will dream up. Loops, flips, twists, bridges, banks, ramps and jumps abound in what will undoubtedly be the most overblown, flashy and ridiculous racer of the year. And we wouldn't want it any other way.

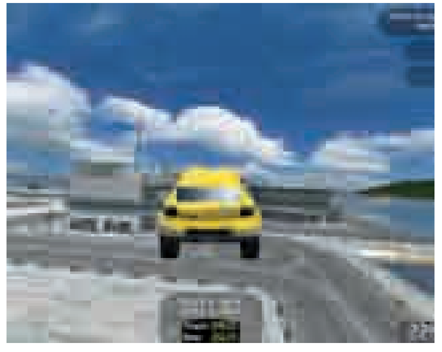

VERDICT 8/10
A RACER OF NIGH-ON UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

This is the greatest and best car in the world. Fact.



INK MY RIDE

One of the most enjoyable features of *Sunrise* is the ability to paint your cars exactly as you want. A basic paint program lets you scribble straight onto the bodywork, and with decals, metallic finishes and stamps galore there's no end to your creative options. This really comes into its own when you head online, allowing a whole community of racers to feast their eyes on your handiwork or download the skin for themselves and pretend they're as awesomely artistic as you. We recommend abusing the colour pink and drawing lots of skulls and crossbones…

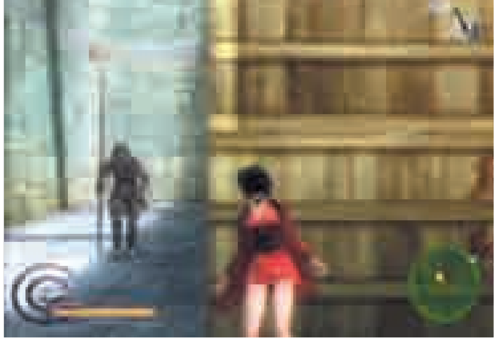


Just because you're in a car, doesn't mean you stay on the ground…





The bosses are thoroughly tedious. Chipping damage off for 20 minutes just isn't fun.


Using your womanly wiles to lure guards to their death is a nice touch. You even have a 30 per cent chance of it actually working.



games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
I SEE YOU BABY: Showing a bit of flesh then stabbing a guard is an interesting way to finish a foe.
HANGMAN: Dangling enemies from beams and then beating them kept us amused for a fair while.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2
OTHER FORMATS
Xbox
ORIGIN
Japan
PUBLISHER
Vivendi
DEVELOPER
Tranji
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1

NEVER SEND A WOMAN TO DO A MAN'S JOB

RED NINJA: END OF HONOR

Alluring femmes fatales are something Japanese developers specialise in. They seem to throw all their efforts into whatever scantily clad lovely they're currently working on to ensure that she's the most desirable and deadly game character to date. Knowing this, it all sounded quite promising for Tranji's latest stealth action title, *Red Ninja*. Unfortunately, 'sounding promising' doesn't quite cut it these days.

We've all been subjected to dodgy in-game cameras. We've just come to accept it as the price we paid when games with a glorious third dimension appeared. That said, though we've come to expect minor errors in this department from even the best titles – and we understand the difficulty involved in ensuring a flawless performance camera-wise – *Red Ninja* has shown us one of the most wretched displays we've ever seen. No matter what the situation, you can near guarantee that your view of the action will be utterly dire. You want to peek round a corner to see if there's a guard patrolling the corridor? No chance, here's the side of a crate. A better view of a particularly difficult jumping section perhaps? Dream on, check out your character's pants. In fact, when the camera's not busy focusing on bits of wall and providing close-ups of the back of your head, it's uncontrollably zooming and flitting around for no reason. As you can imagine, this makes everything from the simple task of walking around to the already difficult boss battles far more time-consuming than they need to be and manages to suck out much of the fun, leaving behind a large heap of irritation.

This enormous, game-wrecking flaw is a shame as Tranji has implemented some great ideas in *Red Ninja*. Warming yourself by torches to minimise damage after a cold swim, bone dislocation to enable you to fit through small gaps, and using your looks to lure foolish guards into traps are features that work reasonably well and could have set this game apart if it wasn't for the fact that many gamers will never persevere long enough to witness them. Even the innovative multi-headed wire weapon you wield that allows you to tie up/hang/slice open enemies when forced into a brawl can't save *Red Ninja* from being a poor *Tenchu* wannabe that simply fails to deliver enjoyment. We played it because we had to – you don't.



VERDICT 3/10
WHEN GOOD IDEAS GO BAD

HARA-KIRI



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS

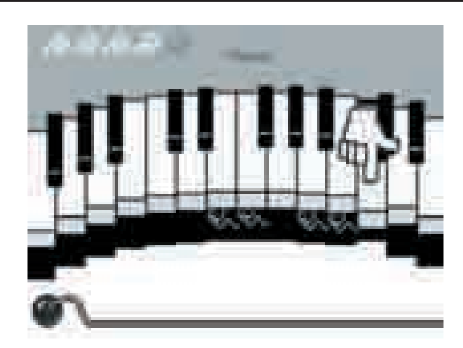

eMag



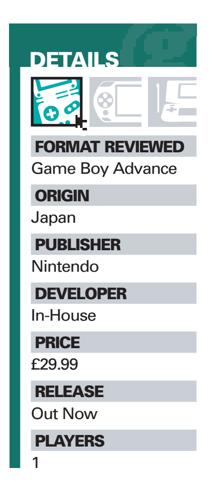
The Wario Watch mode replaces the individual time limits with a cumulative one, making staying alive all the more challenging.



What kind of a man would have clothes pegs attached to his mouth? One who's obviously too lazy to feed himself, of course.



Games that require both button input and movement of the GBA are the hardest of all – practice definitely makes perfect here.



NINTENDO TURNS YOUR WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

WARIOWARE: TWISTED!

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IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

SHAKE IT: The need for more tactile input makes this more of a challenge than other *WarioWare* titles.
CREATIVE LABS: The mini-games often show a level of imagination above their predecessors.

There's no denying that playing *WarioWare: Twisted!* makes you look pretty daft, or at least like someone with an unfortunate twitching disorder. That the game requires you to constantly tilt, turn and shake your GBA also means it's unlikely that many gamers will want to play it anywhere the general public congregate, if only to be sure that they don't scare the children. Unfortunately, then, this leaves a perplexing dilemma: become a gaming recluse who never plays a GBA outside the house, or miss out on what is certainly the best instalment in the *WarioWare* series to date.

As much as it sounds like a massive gimmick, basing most of *Twisted*'s 200-plus mini-games on having to move the GBA around rather than just press buttons enhances the gameplay significantly. This isn't just a videogame; it's a tactile test of skill and balance that genuinely challenges more than just your reflexes. Thanks to the cartridge's built-in gyroscope, just being able to work out what you've got to do in each mini-game is no longer enough – there's also the small matter of knowing which direction to tilt the GBA, how far to tip it (because in some cases you'll end up with the handheld upside down) and whether any button presses are also needed. It's a definite head-scratcher, but one that makes success all the more rewarding simply because of the vast amount of control you have.

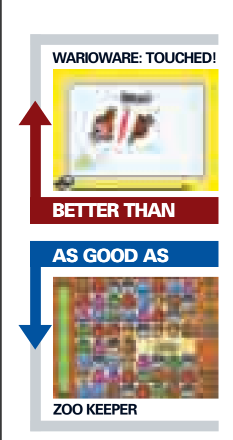
In true *WarioWare* fashion, there are also plenty of things to unlock that, while relatively insignificant on their own, build up a substantial collection of additional sub-games and tasks for you to enjoy if you choose. Souvenirs, as they're known, are won at regular intervals although you have to claim them from the dispenser by rotating the GBA and turning the handle; from throw-away examples like a spinning top or a strange garden gnome to extended and more difficult versions of the regular mini-games, winning all 130 (and then playing around with them) takes up plenty of time.

Where *Touched!* lost some of the series' momentum by pigeon-holing its games into various styles, *Twisted!* literally swings it back in a positive direction. The only negative point is that we can see *Twisted!* being pretty cumbersome to play for anyone who's upgraded to a DS, but even that shouldn't stop you enjoying the genuine innovation that it is.



MORE EFFORT, BUT ULTIMATELY MORE REWARDING






eMag

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Beautiful Game Studios

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
1Gb processor, 128Mb RAM







The match engine is so bad we don't want to talk about it any more.

EIDOS' LATE TACKLE EARNS IT AN EARLY BATH

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5

Way back in September of last year, PC gamers were readying themselves for an epic battle as *Football Manager* and *Championship Manager* prepared to face off against each other to see which would emerge the superior football management sim. But *Champ Manager 5* failed to show, giving Sports Interactive's first outing with new partner Sega a clear run at the title. Now, however, Eidos has thrown its hat into the ring – but is it too little too late?

Initial impressions are good. The menus and layout of *Championship Manager 5* will be instantly recognisable to anyone who's played the series in the past. They are intuitively placed and linked, and the range of sides available to manage is suitably impressive (although it isn't as extensive as *Football Manager*). The most noticeable improvement made to the series by Beautiful Game Studios is the speed at which things rattle along. The game positively flies past in the background, and the front end is not locked as results are processed; this is in stark contrast to Sports Interactive's previous attempts (*Football Manager* included). Would-be Wengers are no strangers to popping the kettle on between matches as the game processes results, but *CM5* minimises all that and really motors along.

So far, so good – but the problems arise when you look more closely at the reasons behind this increased background speed. It's here that *Championship Manager 5* is revealed as the charlatan that it really is. Any football management game lives or dies by one very simple premise: can it convince the player that they are really managing their side? Can it make them care about their club, their players and their results? Does it inject enough realism into what else happens in the game world to convince the player that, far from a solo experience, the game is part of a bigger

So Pandiani was on the pitch for seven minutes, scored a hat-trick, and only gets a score of *five* out of ten? Sheesh.



J'ACCUSE EIDOS

What Eidos has done to *Championship Manager* is a travesty that suggests it is a company rapidly losing touch with what gamers want. In a fiercely competitive market, no-one can survive for long with such a lack of focus. Perhaps the most fitting evidence comes from Eidos' press release announcing the game was ready for release. Which member of the company was quoted to whip up enthusiasm for the game? Head programmer? Chief tester? Quality control? No, the brand manager. Woohoo. The suits have taken over at Eidos and they seem set on taking the place to hell in a handbasket.

FAQs

Q. ARE OTHER VERSIONS PLANNED?
As well as this PC version of the game, console conversions are planned for the Xbox and the PS2, as well as an online browser-based version.

Q. HOW IS CM5 RELATED TO PREVIOUS CM GAMES?
It isn't. It uses the name and has the same in-game colour scheme, but the code has been rebuilt from the ground up by different developers.

Q. SO IS IT WORTH BUYING?
Under no circumstances whatsoever. *Football Manager* is infinitely better. Sorry, Eidos.



picture and they must outwit other managers and players all working independently to win matches for themselves? It's a trick that Sports Interactive has down to a fine art, but on this showing, the developer has a long, long road to travel before *Champ Manager* gets anywhere close to realism.

Those rapidly generated background results are, unfortunately, cobblers. The simulated youth team football is particularly hilarious, as results of 13-0, 8-7 and 15-4 are commonplace. First blood, therefore, to *Football Manager* in the big match. The media in *CM5* is another big own goal. Not only can managers no longer interact with the press (that's 2-0 to *Football Manager* if you're keeping score), but the media will report on the same story day after day. Brad Friedel being chased by Aston Villa is a mildly interesting story. Once. It's less interesting when it clutters up your inbox over 50 times in a season. Another gaffe is that the manager's own club will release statements about players potentially leaving the club – even if the manager has no intention of selling them.

Injury stories are badly written (Bang! 3-0 to Sports Interactive) and offer little information: 'Frank Lampard will be out for four months after injuring his head in training' (*CM5*) as opposed to 'Chelsea fans are mourning the loss of their inspirational skipper for up to four months. Frank Lampard fractured his skull in a routine training exercise, and supporters will be praying for a speedy recovery so he can return to bolster his side's tilt at the title' (*Football Manager*).



Paul Scholes is apparently among the top scorers in the Youth League.

Ridiculously high scores are par for the course here.

However, the biggest crime committed by *Champ Manager* is the awful, awful match engine. It destroys any sense of realism and helps *Football Manager* to complete a rout in what should have been a close match. Goalkeepers stand on one side of the penalty area and throw the ball to defenders on the far side, only for a striker to intercept the ball then spoon his shot over the open goal. Defenders get to the ball before a striker then freeze, allowing their rival to make up ten yards and get the shot in. Rather than jockeying for position at corners, everyone stands stock still, as though nailed to the floor.

The crimes are too numerous to list here, suffice to say that this is *Champ Manager* in name alone. The spirit of the game is alive and well, forming an integral part of the code used by *Football Manager*. The success of that title suggests most gamers have already figured that out. Anyone buying this for old times' sake will be sorely disappointed.

games™ FINGERPRINT

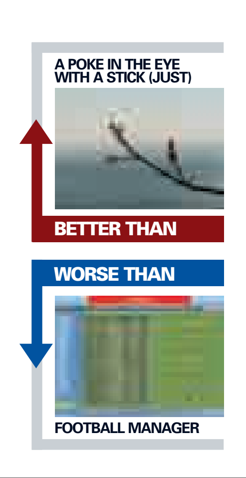
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

ZIPPY: The game processes results in the background much faster than previous versions.

PSEUDO 3D: The match engine is tilted to give a 3D image of the match. It sounds better than it looks.

VERDICT 4/10

ANOTHER OWN GOAL FROM GAFFE-PRONE EIDOS

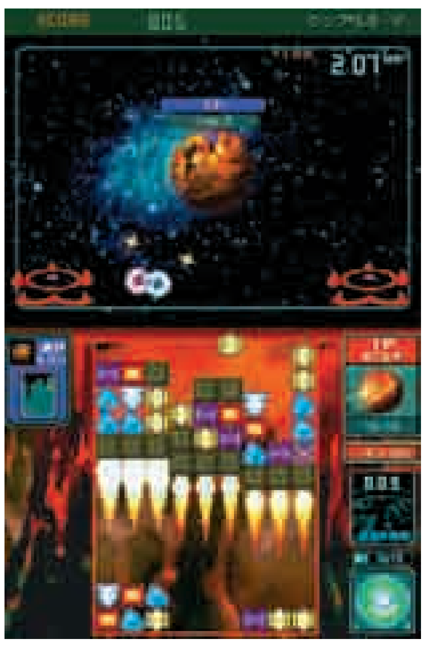




There are so many things you have to watch at once, just keeping ahead of the flood of falling blocks can prove tricky at times.



Each planet is different – some playing areas are wider than others, the gravity varies and some have rules on how you can progress.



If you're running out of launchable blocks you can speed up proceedings by pressing down on the icon in the bottom corner.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Bandai

DEVELOPER
Q Entertainment

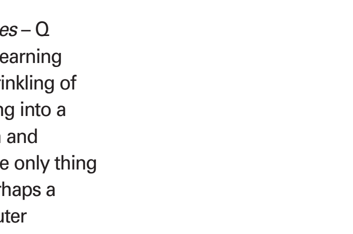
PRICE
¥4,800

RELEASE
Q3 '05
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

METEOS

THANK GOD THE DS ISN'T THAT EASY TO BREAK…



games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

ALIEN WAR: Up to four people can play wirelessly from one cartridge, with much cursing ensuing.

GOING SOLO: You can upload the single-player game to any other DS, so cartless players can join in.

What is it about the thrill of potential failure? *Polarium*'s sedate pace aside, every DS representation of the puzzle genre so far has based itself around such a sensation – that ever-increasing feeling of panic gained from knowing things could go terribly wrong at any moment. If it's a feeling you abhor, then you won't enjoy *Meteos*; it follows the path already well trodden by the likes of *Mr Driller*, *Zoo Keeper* and *WarioWare Touched!* certainly, but the threat of running out of time, lives or even oxygen can't even begin to instil the sense of frantic dread that *Meteos* creates once things get hectic.

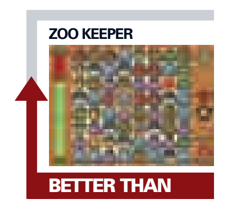
And they will get hectic, about two minutes after you start your first game. Ideally, then, you'll want to spend those two minutes mastering the basics: by using the stylus to move various coloured blocks vertically along the columns (because horizontal movement is prohibited), players have to match up lines of three or more matching blocks either upwards or across in order to 'launch' them into the air like a rocket. Anything sitting on top of the blocks you match gets propelled up with it, ultimately disappearing off the top of the screen… or so you'd hope. However, the fact that gravity plays a part in the proceedings means that some blocks might get dragged back to earth, so you need to master the art of moving launched blocks around (or even throwing loose blocks up from underneath) to add more boost while also creating new launches at the same time.

Against the relaxed pace of *Lumines* – Q Entertainment's PSP puzzler – the learning curve here is a brutal one, with the sprinkling of blocks falling from above swiftly turning into a torrent that requires pinpoint precision and concentration to handle. That this is the only thing you have to worry about initially is perhaps a blessing, but you can soon add computer opponents to battle against or even try out the Star Trip mode that adds varying amounts of gravity and other rules to the action once you feel confident enough in your abilities.

True, *Meteos* makes our brains hurt – but it's in the best way, like the kind of headache you get after eating a tub of ice-cream. Unlockable extras such as field items (both beneficial and hindering) and alien lifeform icons that alter the way the game plays when chosen are nice additions, but the gameplay is more than compulsive enough to keep you hooked anyway. Just don't say we didn't warn you when you crash and burn for the hundredth time…

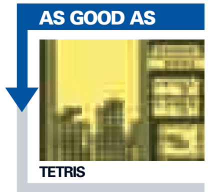
VERDICT 9/10
REDEFINES THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'FIENDISH'

ZOO KEEPER



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



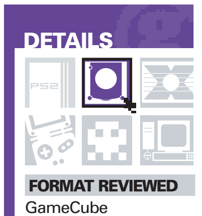
TETRIS


eMag

NOT SO MUCH EXPANDED, MORE A FEW SUBTLE TWEAKS

CHAOS FIELD: EXPANDED

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

OTHER FORMATS
Dreamcast

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Able/Milestone

DEVELOPER
Milestone

PRICE
¥6,400

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

STEEL DRAGON EX

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

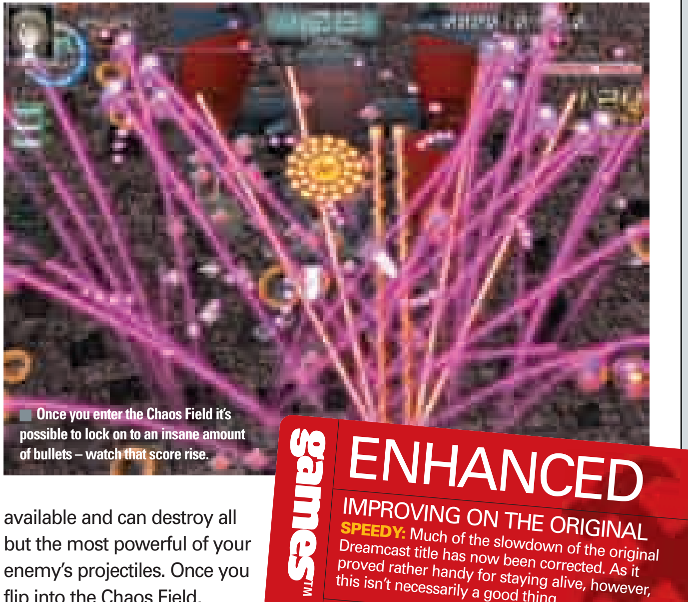
IKARUGA

We absolutely love shoot-'em-ups at the moment. They've been one of the few genres to keep the Dreamcast going in Japan, have successfully colonised the PS2, Xbox and GameCube, and are still doing the business in Japanese arcades. *Chaos Field: Expanded* is the latest blaster to make its way to Nintendo's GameCube – via the arcade, then the Dreamcast – and while it lacks the polish of more recent shooters, it's still surprisingly solid fun and has a soundtrack to die for.

If you're looking for a standard shoot-'em-up, though, you may be disappointed. The Arcade more is little more than a standard boss rush; polish off two increasingly tougher foes straight after each other, then go head-to-head against an even larger opponent until it explodes in all its spectacular, screen-juddering glory. Rinse, lather and repeat. While the GameCube-exclusive Arranged mode does go some way to rectifying this by adding a few minor attack waves, you'll still find yourself wondering where all the enemies have gone. Despite this lack of opposition, *Chaos Field* is still one of the toughest shooters on the market (it's certainly going to take a while to 'single credit' it) and has more than a few nice touches to keep people playing, the most obvious being the titular Chaos Field.

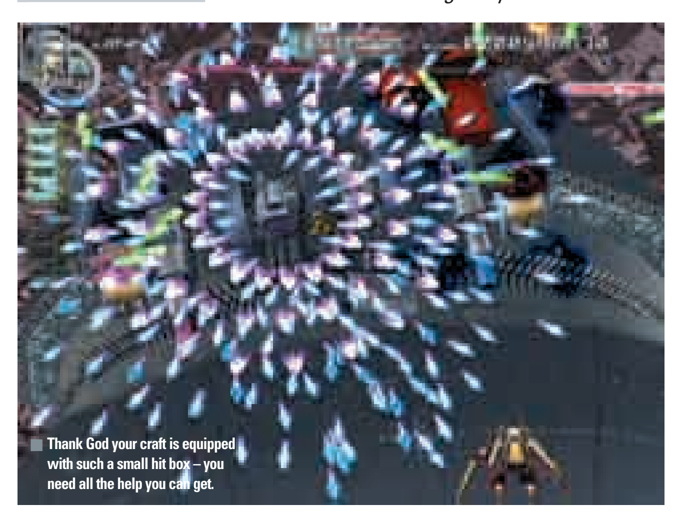
Most of the hectic gameplay is set against the backdrop of the stylish yet poorly textured Order Field. Bullets fly at you thick and fast, but, fortunately, you're capably equipped to deal with them – each fighter (from a selection of three) has a bullet-absorbing shield and a handy lock-on, which is able to fire lasers at enemy craft and bullets. A *Radiant Silvergun*-style sword is also available and can destroy all but the most powerful of your enemy's projectiles. Once you flip into the Chaos Field, though, the game's difficulty jumps up considerably. While your ship's firepower is boosted significantly, the enemy's has also been enhanced and much joypad-chucking will ensue as you desperately try to stay alive. *Chaos Field*'s scoring system requires you to flip between the two fields in order to continually boost your score combo and thus get those all-important high scores.

While this system is reasonably well implemented, it lacks the refinement and accessibility of similar titles and if you're not prepared to put in the extra effort you'll find little else to keep you amused. If you are willing to put in the time, however, you'll find *Chaos Field: Expanded* to be an adequate but by no means essential shooter.



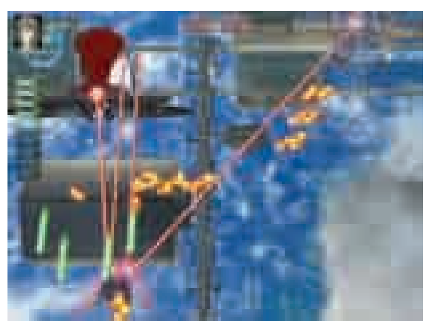
Once you enter the Chaos Field it's possible to lock on to an insane amount of bullets – watch that score rise.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
SPEEDY: Much of the slowdown of the original Dreamcast title has now been corrected. As it proved rather handy for staying alive, however, this isn't necessarily a good thing.

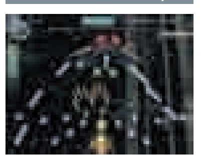


Thank God your craft is equipped with such a small hit box – you need all the help you can get.

VERDICT 6/10
A SOLID BLASTER, BUT WE'VE PLAYED MUCH BETTER

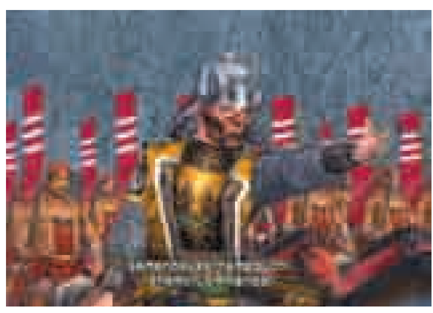


DREAMCAST ¥6,000

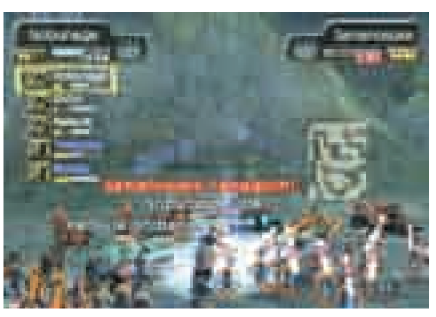


The Dreamcast version is a more straightforward port of the arcade game and so doesn't include the GameCube's Arranged mode or excellent remixed soundtrack. On the other hand, the original slowdown hasn't been touched, so it's easier to dodge bullets.


eMag


Although you're initially stuck with Nobunaga Oda, you can add more officers with each victory and control them during battle.


Some videogame stereotypes simply refuse to die – female Kicho is fast on the battlefield but has weak stamina.


If you hold your officers back, you can build up for large-scale scraps and quick ambushes on enemy armies.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Koei

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
April 29
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

KESSEN III

THE ART OF WAR HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER

Grounded in ancient stories of warfare, full of colourful characters from Chinese history, music pitched somewhere between tongue-in-cheek irony and pompous seriousness… it's not long before you find yourself playing spot the similarity between *Kessen III* and the *Dynasty Warriors* series. But it's surprising to learn just how much the Koei stablemates have in common.

The biggest crossover between the series is the focus on direct, spontaneous combat, which has always been the forte of *Dynasty Warriors*. Ditching its stoic, unflustered approach to turn-based battling, *Kessen III* moves into the realms of real-time war. Controlling Nobunaga Oda, you now get to move him around the battlefield as you please. Push forward on the analogue stick and Oda charges forward with his horsemen slowly jinking into life behind him. It's a far more intuitive system than order-based movement could ever be, and breaking free of these shackles immediately ups *Kessen*'s laborious, jagged pace.


The special effects aren't consistently spectacular but occasionally they do catch your eye with something unexpected

This brings *Kessen* closer to *Dynasty Warriors* than it's ever been, with a new demand for reflexes and quick thinking thanks to the spontaneous action. With combo attacks, switching between units, and updates on how other battles are going, there's now very little to separate the two. This new control scheme does bring a few new problems with it, such as the occasional horseman getting stuck behind scenery while the rest of the cavalry hurtle onward. Yet on the whole it's a resounding success and this renovation alone should snare new fans who've been scared off by the trudging approach to strategy that the series adopted in the past.

The fighting has been renovated to fit snugly alongside the slick pace and it also feels accessible and easy to grasp. Instead of giving orders to attack, you simply lead the attack yourself and your troops will follow suit. As you become comfortable with the basics of fighting, you can begin planning special co-ordinated attacks and pincer movements to trap enemies. The emphasis has now shifted from judging the right time to use Officer Moves (see 'Excuse me, officer' boxout) to

FAQs

Q. DIFFERENT CHARACTERS?
New officers are constantly joining you, giving you more options of who to deploy.

Q. DIFFERENT BATTLES?
You often have the option of which battle to fight next, although all have to be completed before moving on.

Q. DIFFERENT FROM DYNASTY WARRIORS?
Kessen is still more strategic but the line that separates them is becoming more blurred with each release.



In a further nod to *Dynasty Warriors*, the Rampage move lets you charge through soldiers on your own.

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

BIGGER, BETTER: There are more missions, items to find on the battlefield and scrolls to unlock.

FASTER, STRONGER: The combat is more immediate, controlled directly rather than indirectly.

EXCUSE ME, OFFICER

The emphasis on using Officer Moves has been diluted somewhat by the fact that you can use them liberally without too much worry. Each officer holds four skill slots, which are the currency for buying Officer Moves during battle. Moves can do anything from encouraging enemies to defect to simply raising your attack strength. Skill slots recharge over time, though, and in all but the most hectic battles you'll usually find yourself fully charged for the start of each new scrap. It's only once you start using the moves that cost all your skill slots and the battles become relentless that you really need to think about what you're doing, but at this point in the game you should be experienced enough to see battles through without too much hassle anyway.

gathering troops from different areas of the map for attacks on smaller enemy armies. It's not so much picking the right battles as knowing when to pick them. Compared to the tactical know-how required to navigate the taxing battles of *Kessen II*, this feels undemanding and doesn't insist that you work hard to start gleaning enjoyment from the game.

Unfortunately, concessions have been made and the main sacrifice here is depth. By giving *Kessen III* an action tilt and moving away from the war simulation camp of previous *Kessen*s, some of the strategy has fallen by the wayside. It's not until later levels that your ability to multi-task and herd different units towards the right areas of the battlefield are really put to the test, and while *Kessen III* isn't dull in the early stages, it's not particularly engaging either. The War Council screen does provide an illusion of depth, as you can plan your attacks, troop movement and give orders in advance, yet it's just as easy to use Auto-Deploy and leave the PlayStation2 to take care of everything for you. Similarly, the ability to buy and sell equipment even down to the fine details such as horses and accessories doesn't translate to a notable advantage on the battlefield.

Kessen III is a war of attrition rather than anything deeply strategic, which is also why it's so infuriating to see how stunted your officers' AI can be. Before each battle, you enlist officers with their own set of troops to take up position on remote parts of the map. Yet they endlessly charge into battles they cannot possibly win and will find themselves overwhelmed in what should be an even clash. The problem is easily solved by taking charge of the unit yourself but it's a needless worry and one that often leaves you at a disadvantaged position through no fault of your own.



However, while the shallow and sometimes troubled road to victory does mar an enjoyable experience, it certainly doesn't ruin *Kessen III*. It can feel like My First Strategy Game but persistence to see it through to the later battles pays off as the difficulty increases. *Kessen III* manages to prove that strategy and fun aren't mutually exclusive in the war sim genre. The series still needs to find the right balance between depth and instant fun, but this is proof that Koei is getting closer to the elusive formula with each sequel.



VERDICT 7/10

TREMENDOUS FUN EVEN WITHOUT THE DEPTH

KESSEN II



BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



DYNASTY WARRIORS 4


eMag

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC, Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Traveller's Tales

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

SO, YODA CAN LIFT UP AN X-WING BUT NOT A LONE LEGO BLOCK…

LEGO STAR WARS

If we rated games on charm factor alone, *Lego Star Wars* would receive a resounding ten. From the moment we saw Legoised versions of Yoda, Darth Maul and Obi-Wan Kenobi running around in all their miniature glory we were immediately hooked for the full four hours it took us to complete the game. A warm, fuzzy feeling cuddlier than a dozen Ewoks started to sweep through our cynical bones and the discovery of each new *Star Wars* character and spaceship caused a nostalgic tear of joy to seep from our jaded eyes. Sadly, though, charm alone isn't enough to save Traveller's Tales' latest effort.

The killer combo of both the Lego and *Star Wars* licences may cause you to pick this up quicker than Anakin turned to the Dark side, but even the briefest of plays will convince you that *Lego Star Wars* is nothing more than Banther Poodoo. While we can't fault the superb score and effects, humorous cut-scenes and atmospherically drawn locations (some of which are very smart indeed), the core gameplay is somewhat lacking. 'But it's for kids,' we hear you cry. Maybe so, but even kids – or those who are just young at heart – will no doubt want a challenge that lasts longer than it would take to watch the original trilogy.

Being able to use the Force to put Lego items back together again is fun for about… ooh, ten minutes, and while you can use plenty of different characters in order to progress through each stage, the puzzles you'll encounter are unlikely to test a Tusken Raider, let alone a ten-year-old child. *Lego Star Wars* is basic, generic platforming that simply requires you to collect lots of different items, which in turn allow you to unlock plenty of extra goodies. This would be perfectly acceptable if it wasn't for the ropey AI of your team-mates and the somewhat stodgy button mashing that passes for combat. It's a real shame, as later levels introduce a wide selection of different gameplay styles that range from frantic on-rails blasting to frustratingly tricky Pod racing.

Of course, once a true Jedi has breezed through the game, he'll no doubt want to go back in order to unlock the huge amount of extras that have been painstakingly hidden around each stage. Sadly, playing through once was more than enough for us.

STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



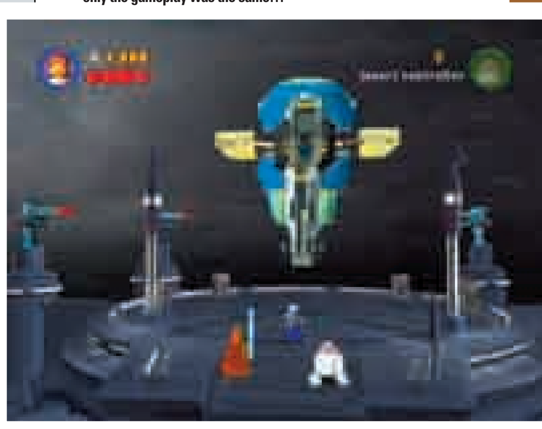
SUPER STAR WARS

VERDICT 4/10
FUN? BLOCKS, MORE LIKE

games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
ALL-SQUARE: Seeing the likes of Mace Windu, Darth Maul and Jango Fett recreated as Lego men is hilarious and nearly worth the asking price alone. Nearly…



The cut-scenes have had a lavish amount of attention spent on them. If only the gameplay was the same…

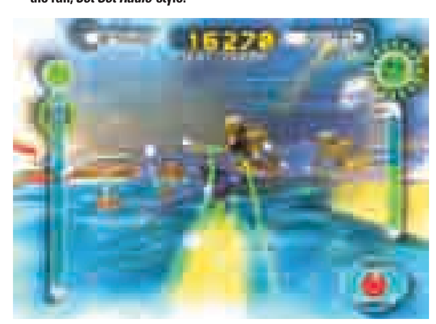




Scenes like the Arena Duel really show off the polished engine. Certain areas are quite stunning.



There's no need to balance when railing; *Antigrav* locks you onto the rail, *Jet Set Radio*-style.

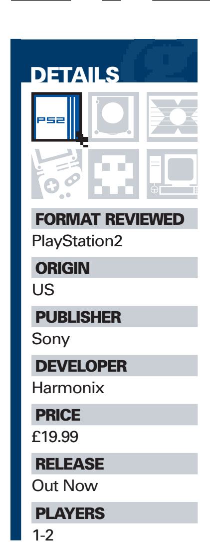




It's a long way down, so you can combo together a dozen or so tricks before landing.

EYETOY: ANTIGRAV

SKATE OR DIET



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Harmonix

PRICE
£19.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Until now, EyeToy titles have without exception kept to the 'safe' arena of wood-chopping, milkshake-mixing mini-games, and though each collection released has been hit-and-miss in terms of gameplay quality, each one has featured enough games to offer value for money. However, *EyeToy: Play* and third-party offerings such as *Monkey Mania* were merely cartoon shorts preceding the feature-length main attraction; with *Antigrav*, Harmonix has created a hoverboarding action title in the vein of *SSX*. Not only this, but you don't even have to look at your own gurning face this time as you flail around. But the question remains: can Sony's little camera present a substantial enough experience to carry an entire game?

In order to answer, it might first be necessary to honestly answer a question about yourself: can you run up and down a flight of stairs without passing out? In *Antigrav*, the player stands in the same pose as the on-screen hoverboarder and can control the direction of movement with even the slightest degree of lean, as well as ducking and jumping obstacles. Meanwhile, boosting is achieved by bending the knees further and lessening air resistance around your character. Of course, this will be a stretch for a great number of armchair gamers who are used to waving one forearm in order to chop a digital log with their EyeToy; even holding the basic pose required for accurate control puts weight on the calves, back and arms. Take into account the requirement of reaching out either side (at high, middle and low positions) to grab point-scoring items and you have a work-out that rivals most intensive yoga classes for the pressure it puts on your musculature.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

TONY-STRAIN: Tone as you play, with EyeToy's insistence on physical exertion.

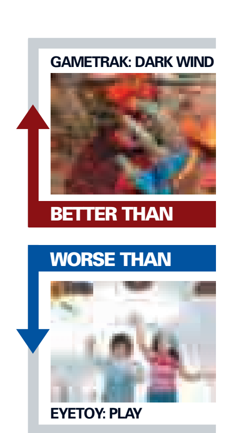
SPEED AND STYLE: There are two modes, which forefront either flair or boosting downhill.

Tricks are performed using a move-specific semaphore while in the air (for example, waving both arms low-high will perform a back flip), and it is here that the ambition of *Antigrav* outweighs the accuracy of the camera. This is made more problematic by the need to stand in the same place throughout in order to hold the correct screen position, and having to regiment your jumping so that you don't move even slightly forward on landing. In comparison to the flair displayed by your character, it's almost as if you have to limit your fun in order to meet discipline requirements, making *Antigrav* far more frustrating than you would imagine. So while this is unlikely to attract a new EyeToy audience, the post-pub contingent that plays games for the enjoyment rather than a desire to excel will lap it up – provided, that is, their fitness levels are up to the challenge.



VERDICT 5/10

A GOOD WORKOUT, BUT A FRUSTRATING DISCIPLINE




eMag

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
HAL Laboratories

PRICE
¥4,800

RELEASE
13 June
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

KIRBY: CANVAS CURSE

SMALL, ROUND AND BOUNCING ON THE GROUND



We've all played *Kirby* games before and – as long as the little chap's not gliding around a track on an uncontrollable star – we all know what to expect. For those who have played *Kirby & The Amazing Mirror* on the GBA, *Canvas Curse* is going to seem fairly familiar. The same adorable enemies with the same removable abilities inhabit similarly cute environments – it's classic Kirby. Of course, it's the control method that seen the changes…

Rather than relying on Kirby's now trademark ability to inflate his fat little body and bob around levels until you tell him to exhale, you now have to use a pot of rainbow paint to get him out of scrapes. A wave of the stylus will send a streak of said paint in a direction of your choice and provide a solid platform for the new rolling Kirby to make his way around the level. A bit of a poke and his roll will accelerate, and touching enemies will temporarily stun them so you can tumble into them and rob them of their skills. It sounds simple and on paper we're sure it looks to have more than a little in common with *Catch! Touch! Yoshi!*, but we're pleased to report that it actually has far more depth.

This is a proper platformer. Large multi-routed levels provide secret doors and plenty of hiding places for the stars and medals lurking in each, and it actually gets to the point where the missions will outwit you every time unless you've mastered the use of the stylus and Kirby's many abilities. The break in the gameplay comes with the boss battles. These will see you leaving the main areas of play to take part in joining dots, playing pinball or laying down mine cart tracks against your choice of the three bosses. These are pretty simple and definitely not the most intense end-of-level battles we've ever encountered, but they do offer a change in pace and each of them will eventually be unlocked as score-bettering mini-games.

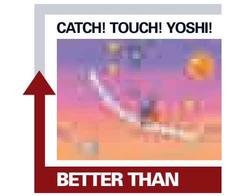
It's good to see a proper platformer on the DS that manages to not only make good use of the stylus, but actually be controllable and still be fun. But of course, it's not going to be long before Nintendo runs out of headline characters that can be prodded with a little plastic stick…



VERDICT 8/10
YOU'LL BE TICKLED PINK

FINGERPRINT games™
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
ROLL WITH ME: It's good to see Kirby has lost his cheating floating ability.
BOSS OF ME?: Choosing which boss you want to face at the end of each level is a nice touch.

CATCH! TOUCH! YOSHI!

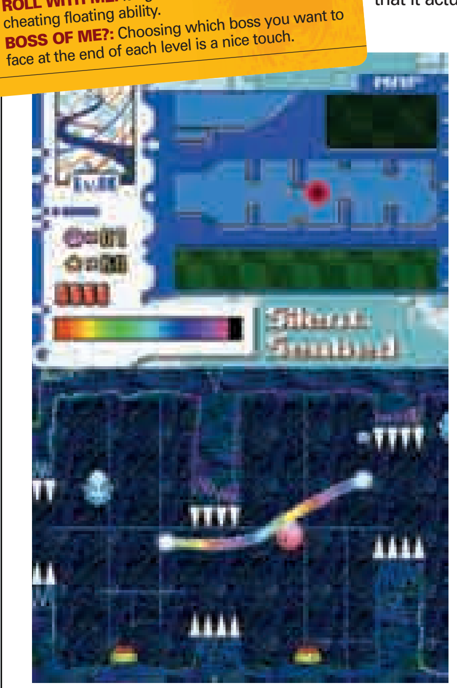


BETTER THAN

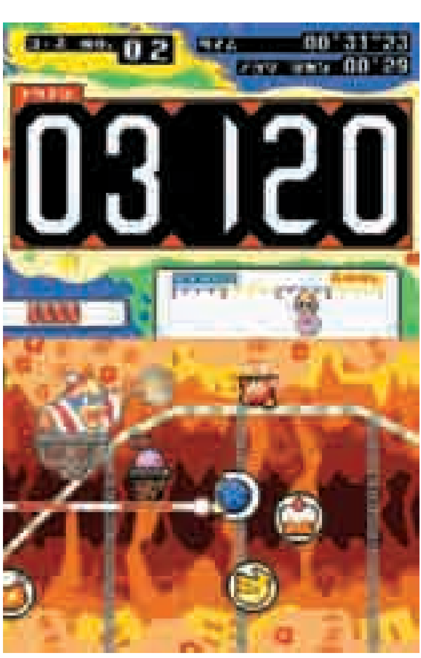
WORSE THAN



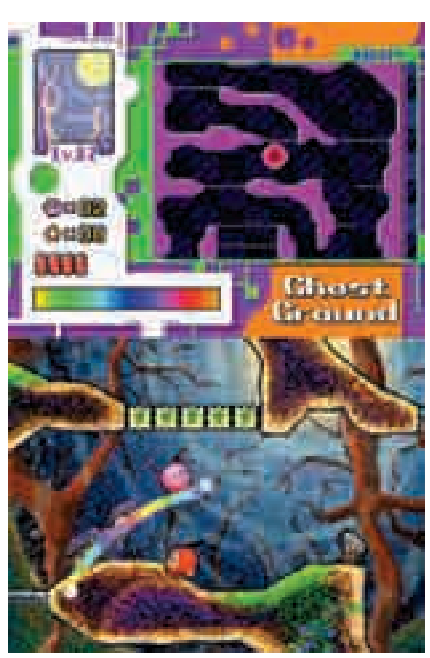
KIRBY & THE AMAZING MIRROR



Kirby's lack of flying ability makes these spikes a lot more of a challenge than in previous games.



Have you got the necessary speed to beat King Dedede in a race? Probably – it's not too tough.



Who'd have thought a few pots of magic rainbow paint would be so useful? Get down to your local B&Q immediately…


eMag





This caption was never going to happen without making a Squid Vicious gag.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Square Enix

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
TBC
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

MUSASHI: SAMURAI LEGEND

HAS MUSASHI GOT THE SAMURAI OF THE TIGER?

One thing we all need as the long summer days approach is a good adventure game to keep us away from the sunlight and rob us of the best hours of the day. It's a good job that *Musashi: Samurai Legend* has arrived just in time to apply for the role.

As is so often the case with games in this genre, the princess-rescuing mission that you've been pulled through time and space to complete isn't going to be as easy as first thought. One simple rescue mission really wouldn't make for much of a game in this day and age, so before you'll be powerful enough to take on the enemies on the top tier of evil you'll need to acquire five elemental swords – again, not that easy. Before you can claim the swords as your own you'll have to track down each of the Sword Maidens (all of whom have been conveniently kidnapped or are in hiding) who know the locations of said weapons. It looks like it's going to be a hell of a day for poor little Musashi.

Aside from some gorgeous cel-shading and some visually impressive locations, *Samurai Legend* starts off looking much like anything else in the genre: chop up a few bad guys, grab a Dragonfly Belt… y'know, the usual. But it soon becomes apparent that we're looking at a game that's had much more thought put into it than first appears. The most interesting element of the game is Musashi's learning ability. On discovering a new enemy, it's possible to learn any new attacks that they may have by locking on to them, letting your Focus Meter build up and then hitting the correct sequence of buttons when they use their moves against you. This feature ensures that your skills grow not only in accordance with how you choose to level yourself up, but also with how bold you are when it comes to dealing with new enemies.





Although many devastating super moves are at your disposal, you can only arm one at a time.





The mimicking ability is one of the best features the game has. Genius.

FAQs

Q. WHAT ABOUT SIDE-QUESTS?
Not really, though you can always revisit past areas to 'mop up'.

Q. HOW'S THE CAMERA?
Pretty good. We had very few problems with it. A welcome change.

Q. WHAT ABOUT PUZZLES?
A few, but there's nothing here that's going to test your brain too much.

Although there are plenty of superb ideas like this throughout the game, it's a shame that some aren't as well realised as they perhaps should be. A good example of this is Musashi's ability to pick up and carry some of the characters he comes across. At the beginning of the game when you're taught about our hero's combat abilities while burdened with another character, it's fairly obvious that this will happen quite a bit – but it's unlikely you'll realise quite how much. Every maiden you come across will be unable to walk for some reason – they'll either be too tired, asleep or just fancy being carried for a bit – and it's a routine that gets old extremely quickly. For those who remember lugging around Princess Ruto in *The Ocarina Of Time*, you'll know roughly what's in store. Even though you're blessed with the ability to attack while in these situations, you soon find yourself shunning the moves you've been taught and merely running past the many enemies blocking your path with the hope that you'll make it to the exit without taking too much damage, as it's a much easier and quicker way of dealing with a tired situation. It really could have been used better.

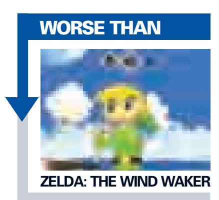
This gripe aside, *Samurai Legend* has a lot to offer. Sprawling levels provide plenty of challenges and there are many nice touches that show the effort that's been put into the title. Although the lack of any side-quests creates a reasonably linear experience, the lure of extra abilities will undoubtedly see you returning to areas in an effort to track down the last few remaining townsfolk – a task that's going to take a fair chunk of time. However, as the game progresses, rather than a gradual rise in difficulty, the later missions and optional tasks merely require a larger amount of repetitive chopping rather than any extra effort. Shame.

Despite being known for its ability to provide us with quality RPGs such as *Kingdom Hearts*, Square Enix has done itself pretty proud with this move into the adventuring genre, and the RPG influences that surface throughout the title just add to the quality. We definitely suggest you give this a go.

VERDICT 7/10
NOT QUITE A LEGEND, BUT SOLID ADVENTURING FUN

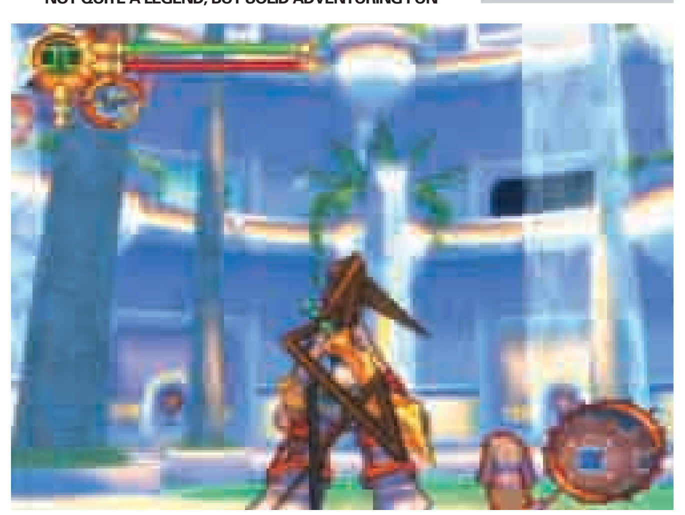
RATCHET AND CLANK 3

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

YOU DRIVE ME CRAZY

Every hero needs a way to get around and Musashi is no exception – in fact, he has several modes of transport. Not only will he get to each level by means of a giant flying whale, but in order to give you a brief break from all the swordplay, some stages feature vehicle sections. When you first approach the motorcycle at the beginning of the game you can't help but expect a lightning-fast, skill-testing driving section but, unfortunately, all you get is a drawn-out length of road that seems to hold no purpose whatsoever – yet another wasted opportunity. These vehicle sections take a fair few forms but are ultimately nothing more than a quick way to get a bit of cash or an opportunity to slice up a few ninjas while on a bike.



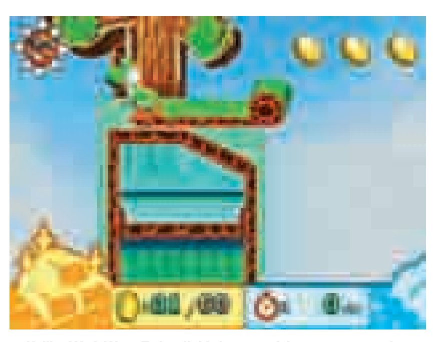
The town is your hub and will provide a place to rest between missions.



There are plenty of parachuting items like this, and plenty of chances for you to miss them before cursing and swearing like a trooper.



Tipping the GBA to slide things like this giant abacus around is easy enough, but it's not enough to make the game fun.

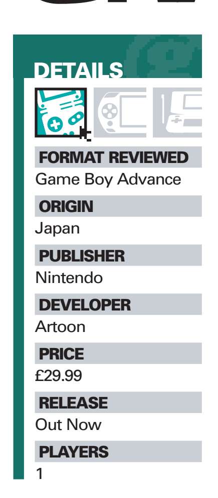


Unlike *WarioWare: Twisted!*, this is a one-trick pony – once you've unrolled one platform, you've unrolled them all.

YOSHI NEARLY EARNS HIMSELF ZERO G'S

YOSHI'S UNIVERSAL GRAVITATION

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Artoon

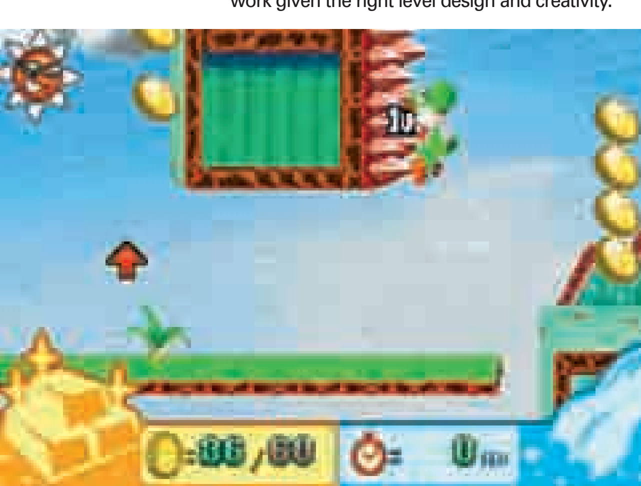
PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

As a game that has arrived on the shelves with virtually no promotion, it should come as little surprise that *Yoshi's Universal Gravitation* isn't all that fun. In fact, it's a lesson in tedium and annoyance that creates the kind of game you'd give to someone you didn't like that much, but were obliged to buy a present for anyway.

Despite featuring one of Nintendo's headline characters, *YUG* is entirely the product of Artoon, a developer that can move a cat through time and space, but fails to grasp the ability to make a decent handheld game. It's a pity, because *YUG* sounds like a good idea in principle; making use of the gyroscopic add-on for GBA cartridges, players must tip their handheld around in order to alter the landscape around Yoshi to help him move through it, collecting various items along the way. A simple idea, certainly, and one that should work given the right level design and creativity.



But it doesn't. Instead, *YUG* uses the cheapest tricks in the book to create levels you have to play through over and over in order to get everything right. Items that float down on parachutes and disappear off the bottom of the screen if you don't get to a certain point in the level quick enough? Items that whizz past overhead as you didn't see them until it was too late, but then can't go back to get because the level's sloped in the wrong direction? Awkwardly laid-out items hanging in mid-air, making collecting all of them virtually impossible unless you repeat the same section several times? These and more besides are all here. We're not saying the game should be easy, but skilful play should be rewarded rather than punished; when even those taking their time and patiently ploughing through each level end up cursing at the game's clumsy design, you know there's a problem.

games™ FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

SIDE SCROLLIN': *YUG*'s style of platform gameplay is incredibly shallow and uninspired.

TIP-TUP: The gyroscope adds another level to the platform action, although it's too clumsy to be fun.

The fact that even the tilt functionality doesn't appear to have been implemented entirely (you can only turn the GBA so far before Yoshi starts flailing like an idiot, making things extra difficult) only serves to make this game feel all the more lazy. What's rather confusing, however, is that the thing that ruins *YUG* is exactly what makes *WarioWare: Twisted!* such great fun. Is this a sign that it really is only Nintendo that's truly grasped the concept of innovation enough to put it to good use? Perhaps. Although that doesn't bode well for the DS…



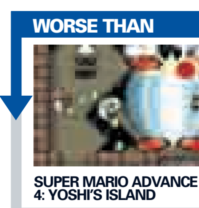
VERDICT 4/10
A DECIDEDLY CLUMSY AND IRRITATING GAME

ELF: THE MOVIE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: YOSHI'S ISLAND


eMag

HAUNTING GROUND

ONE GIRL AND HER PSYCHOLOGICAL TORMENT

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

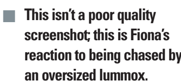
RELEASE
29 April
(Japan: out now)

PLAYERS
1

With *Resident Evil 4* currently showing gamers that survival horror has somewhere to progress beyond the basic *Biohazard* template, it's interesting that Capcom should decide to bring *Haunting Ground* to Western territories. For where *Resident Evil 4* returns to the drawing board and innovates – placing new emphasis on the 'survival' aspect of the genre – *Haunting Ground* takes *Biohazard* as a jumping-off point and develops it in the direction of *Clock Tower*, forefronting the slow build-up of tension. It's a game that powers up the suspense with eeriness and surrealism before jolting it loose with a sudden moment of horrific shock, and as such it does a fantastic job of getting under the skin from very early on.

For example, the influence of *Clock Tower* is not only evident in the scantily clad female teenage protagonist – endowed with the ability to run and hide rather than attack her enemies with any real conviction – but also in the game's atmosphere. Life-size dolls and mummified humans litter the game world, while the music is closer to the sound of industrial power-tool murder than an orchestral score. Meanwhile, plot-wise, *Haunting Ground* plays on the most basic of primal fears rather than an immediate dread of zombies. After a car crash, Fiona wakes in a surreal and suitably Gothic castle inhabited by Debilitas the hulking manchild, Riccardo the mysterious puppet master and Daniella, a man-made, longpig-cooking beauty devoid of the ability to feel pleasure or pain. Thus gameplay divides itself between the standard exploration/puzzle-solving elements you would expect to find, and running away from Debilitas' efforts to play with you until you break or Daniella's desire to remove your internal organs with an enormous shard of glass.

If this all sounds highly typical, then it's worth noting that *Haunting Ground* has several highly effective gimmicks up its sleeve, which are used to great effect to distance it from more humdrum examples such as *Silent Hill 4: The Room* or *Obscure*. For one, there's no life gauge anywhere in the game; rather, the screen has varying levels of noise that distort according to how scared Fiona is (darkening until a black screen signals death). In addition, her movement will become more uncontrollable with each level of fear, so she can't run without overbalancing and sprawling onto her hands. It's a simple technique, to be sure – and one that requires gamers to learn the meaning of these screen distortions in order to estimate how much 'life' the character has left – but it really pulls the otherwise undemanding run-and-hide concept into somewhere more involving for the gamer.





This isn't a poor quality screenshot; this is Fiona's reaction to being chased by an oversized lummox.



A debate rages here as to how old Fiona is, but the consensus agrees she's 'worryingly young'.



Freudian psychology and the single girl: there are many things of concern to find in *Haunting Ground*.

COOKING WITH METAL

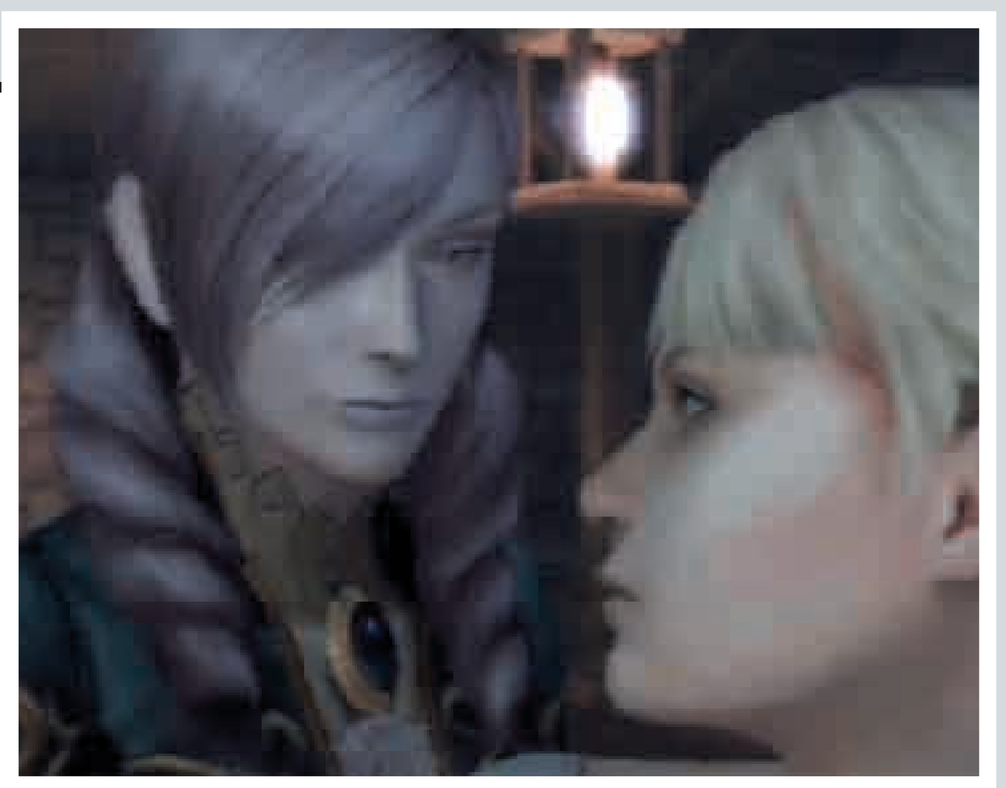
In one of the more interesting sub-elements of *Haunting Ground*, several alchemic hidden rooms throughout the game enable Fiona to create new fear-reducing and health compounds from medallions strewn around the play area. We're not quite sure if something has been lost in translation, but it's an incredibly complicated procedure with little room for error, and many gamers may find they're forced to rely on the pieces of lavender and camomile they can find growing, which serve the same purpose. The system can also be employed to forge weapons – often little flashbangs that stun an enemy – but again there are plenty of collectables that will do the job well enough if you conserve your stock and use Hewie to attack as much as possible.



Fiona asks a question with a blindingly obvious answer: it's there to generate a sense of unease. Even if it is just a snooker table.

However, the most innovative aspect of *Haunting Ground* is Hewie, which despite sounding like an acronym for an Eighties action robot is actually the castle dog. Befriended early on by Fiona, Hewie can be used to search a room, sit on switches and collect unreachable items with a flick of the right analogue stick. Hewie's presence alters the game dynamic significantly; not only does your canine companion add a sense of security to the little-girl-lost scenario, but even enables gamers to take the upper hand when being chased by commanding the dog to attack any nearby enemies. Animated with a real sense of character, Hewie also needs to be praised or chastised in order to keep his mood in check, making control a far more bargained process than merely sending him on pre-set routines.

All these elements are tied together tightly, ensuring that *Haunting Ground*'s gameplay is never as bitty as it sounds on paper. However, the game is far from perfect, chiefly due to the abstract nature of some of the puzzles and the amount of time spent wandering the enormous environments searching for the odd-shaped hole to fit the odd-shaped object in your inventory. In fact, at times it's so obscure as to be reminiscent of the zaniest of LucasArts' point-and-clickers, and while bizarre puzzles work within the milieu of a light-hearted comedy romp, here they detract from the immediacy of escape and highlight the prescribed, mechanical nature of adventure games in general.





As a result, *Haunting Ground* stands as an interesting attempt to broaden the appeal of horror games, even if its innovative successes are counterbalanced by an adherence to old-fashioned adventure sleuthing. A branching storyline adds replay value, too, with several extra paths and costumes for Fiona available on a second play-through. Nonetheless, five years ago Capcom's chiller would be unlikely to have seen a European release, and we applaud the fact that PAL gamers will at least get to experience the sort of distinctly Japanese title they would otherwise miss.

VERDICT 7/10

A BOX OF MIXED DOG BISCUITS – SOME TASTY, SOME NOT

FAQs

Q. ANOTHER SURVIVAL-HORROR DUD?
Not at all. *Haunting Ground* has a lot going for it to make it stand out.

Q. SO NO PUSH-SWITCHES OR KEY PUZZLES?
Erm… let's just say it mixes the old with the new.

Q. BUT IS IT ACTUALLY SCARY?
Perhaps not, but it is relentlessly eerie and often violently surreal.

games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

GIRL'S BEST FRIEND: Use your doggy pal to help you solve the castle's puzzle.

TV'S BROKE: Experience terror from the inside, as the screen distorts to show Fiona's level of panic.





If you take a good look around on your next big night out, you'll probably notice that crawling round some of the more populated areas of your town are 'pimped' cars. Not pimped in an MTV way, admittedly, but it's obvious that there are many who find great joy in bolting a huge spoiler to the back of £150 worth of Fiat Panda, and then cruising around in said vehicle with Nelly Furtado's latest offering blaring from a selection of tinny speakers and a distorted bass bin. This considered, it comes as no surprise that titles allowing you to do the whole customisation thing properly sell very well and often linger around the top of the charts for worrying lengths of time. The *Need For Speed Underground* series has proved that it's a winning formula, the much delayed *Juiced* will be making an appearance very soon, and now the well-known *Midnight Club* series has gone the same way. Welcome to the *DUB Edition*…

For the most part, *Midnight Club 3* sticks very firmly to the rules set down by the first couple

MIDNIGHT CLUB 3:



COULD IT BE THE RIDE OF YOUR LIFE?

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMAT
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Rockstar

DEVELOPER
Rockstar San Diego

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2 (1-8 Online)

of games. This is arcade racing; for all the licensed vehicles and brand names that may be splashed around here, they are the only dose of realism you should expect. Neither lamp posts nor trees provide any hindrance to you whatsoever, whether you're travelling by car or bike. Similarly, other vehicles can be simply be barged out of the way most of the time with little consequence – an element that even the most accessible racing titles such as *NFSU2* and *Burnout 3* have been fairly strict about. While this lack of any 'real' obstacles greatly limits the chance of you leading for the majority of a race only to crash out and be overtaken on the final lap – an annoying aspect of nearly all racing titles – it unfortunately also manages to create a relatively empty and, at times, skill-free racing experience.

Aside from the huge vehicle customisation options, there's one other big difference between this and its forerunners: each class of vehicle now has its own special ability to aid it in getting to the finish line in a respectable position. These specials are charged up by driving dangerously and range from a bullet-time effect (yes, it's in racing games now) that allows you to take on even the tightest of corners without having to slow down, right the way through to a pulse that will throw any nearby rivals out of control. Although fun to play around with, these moves further add to the game's growing emptiness, and when added to the copious amounts of nitrous that you'll undoubtedly have attached to your vehicle's underside and the permanent slipstream







Once you get a fair way into the game the speeds you can reach are pretty impressive.

GO YOUR OWN WAY

One thing that we always associate with the *Midnight Club* series is arrows. Rather than blocking off roads that lead in the wrong direction, only a hovering arrow is there to deter you from choosing that path. Although this provides a much greater opportunity for short-cut finding, more often than not you'll see yourself zipping past an arrow then having to turn around and fight your way to the front of the pack again; as it goes, this isn't usually that difficult but it's still annoying. After a couple of days' play we managed to develop a near perfect 'one eye on the map' strategy. If you're thinking of getting *DUB Edition* then we suggest you learn it.

DUB EDITION

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
SNAILS PACE: Well, it's the first time we've ever seen bullet-time in a racing game.
DO IT YOUR WAY: A level of customisation that even *NFSU2* struggles to match.

boost of which every car, bike and van has an unlimited supply, there's almost no situation that you can't come back from. This is a treat for those who just want to put together a pretty car and then drive around a track for a bit and win, but those wishing to show off skills and do a little more than change the colour of their rims will have to wade through a good few hours of play before they even get a sniff of a chance.

You see, you have to play *Midnight Club 3* for quite a while to get the best from it. Half a day of play will show you nothing that you haven't experienced better elsewhere, but – as with *NFSU* – it all becomes a lot more enjoyable once you've unlocked a few of the goodies and got a reasonable amount of cash to spend on them. The speed at which you end up tearing around the three huge maps is eventually very impressive and the opponents step up to the plate to provide some great races; it's just a shame you have to work so hard to get to the bulk of the fun.

While there are plenty of modes and all the regular online features you'd expect from a racing title, there's little here that inspires us to recommend *DUB Edition* above any of the other pimping opportunities that are either already out or due to make an appearance soon, and it's certainly only worth bothering with if you're willing to invest a fair bit of time.

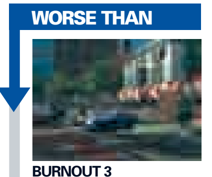
VERDICT 6/10
FAIR PIMPING FUN

FLATOUT



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



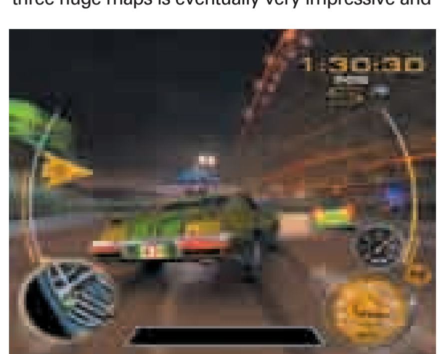
BURNOUT 3

FAQs

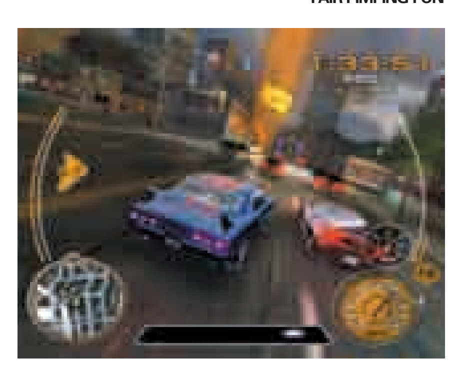
Q. HOW LONG IS IT GOING TO TAKE??
If you want to do everything then you'd better set aside a fair few months.

Q. BETTER THAN NFSU2?
They're pretty close off the line but *DUB Edition* just pips it to the post.

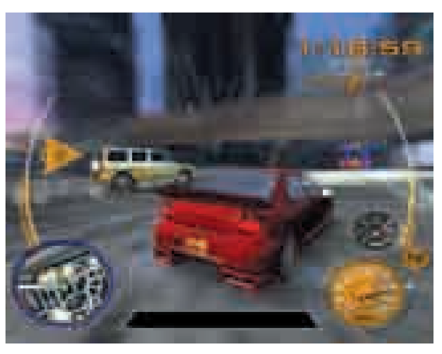
Q. CAN YOU RUN PEOPLE DOWN AGAIN?
They seem to be much faster this time, unfortunately.



Despite looking cool, muscle cars are a brave option. They do have the most devastating specials, mind.

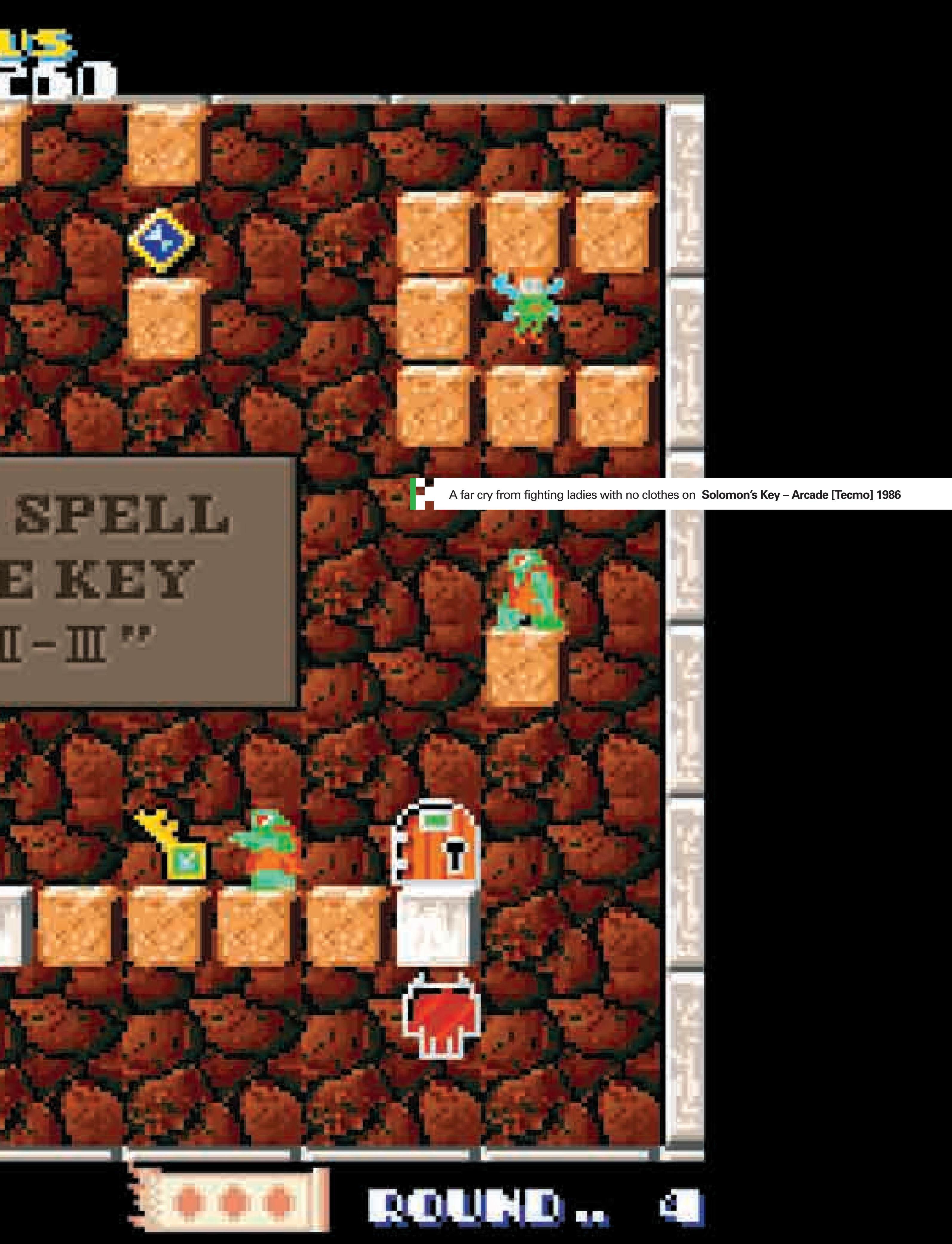


Those pesky arrows are back. Plenty of wrong turns and missed checkpoints are to be expected…



It's amazing how little the other traffic affects you. A penalty of some sort for poor driving would have been nice.


1p
18960
CAST A
Fairy..4



A far cry from fighting ladies with no clothes on **Solomon's Key – Arcade [Tecmo] 1986**


eMag


RETRO
MICRO GAMES A ION
A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.31 MAY 2005
00p
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
WE LOOK BACK AT TAITO'S CLASSIC SLASH-EM-UP
RASTAN
CLASH OF THE TITANS
POPFUL MAIL
We take a look at one of gaming's best-kept secrets
WA ER DAY
PLUG 'N' PLAY STICKS
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, SIX OF THE BEST, REATEST GAME EVER, RETRO CONTACT, ULTIMATE COLLECTION AND MUCH MORE...

Retro News

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

Nostalgia can be a dangerous enemy and a faithful ally. It can fill us with happy memories and protect us from the harsh realities of everyday life. Every now and then, though, nostalgia gets the better of you and you're left open to a sucker-punch from which there's no escape.

It was one o'clock on a Saturday morning, me and an old school friend, Paul, had just watched *Saw* and were looking for a decent Xbox game to play. As I reached over to *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, Paul instead opted for the N64 and *GoldenEye*. "I bloody love this game," he gushed and quickly booted the multiplayer up.

As we traipsed around the stuttery levels and tried to spot each other against the now poorly textured backdrops, realisation began to dawn on us that this was no longer the game we both fondly remembered. "It's a bit shit now, isn't it?" Paul stated, his voice clearly cracking with disappointment. Quick as a shot, in went *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, only to be followed by "was the frame rate really that bad?". This griping went on for several more minutes, so I went and made us a coffee.

I returned to find that all was well – he'd dug out *Super Mario 64* and was about to rescue Princess Peach for the third time. Tranquillity and my faith in retro games had been restored.



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

THE RETRO LOVE JUST KEEPS GROWING

PLAYMORE CONTINUES TO RAID SNK'S BACK CATALOGUE

Here at **games™**, we're firm believers that the 2D dream should be kept alive. We'll never stop playing the likes of *Final Fight* or *Uridium*, and as long as we're drawing breath we'll keep hammering away at classic 2D titles. Thank the lord, then, for Playmore and Ignition Entertainment. Both publishers are determined to treat SNK fans to plenty of re-releases, and over the next year we can expect some classy standalone games and compilations.

Beat-'em-up fans are going to be well catered for as Playmore has at least four fighting titles due over the next few months. *Bakumatsu Roman: Last Blade 2 In 1* is set to include both *Last Blade* games, while *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* will hopefully be a perfect conversion of the hit 1999 MVS game. Finally, two *King Of Fighters* collections are also on the cards. Both compilations will include three games with collection one spanning *'95* to *'97*, while the second covers *'98* to *'00*.

If fighting isn't your thing, *Twinkle Star Sprites* is bound to be a huge hit with both puzzle and shoot-'em-up fans alike. It's unclear how many of these titles Ignition will be bringing to the UK (if at all) but we wouldn't be at all surprised if at least a few of them eventually make it to our shores.

While some of Ignition's recent SNK releases have taken a little while to arrive, at least the publisher is actually trying its best to make these games available to a UK audience. In a world packed full of *Halo 2*s and *FIFA Streets*, it's great to see that titles such as *Metal Slug 3* and *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos* getting released and actually being enjoyed.



▲ *Last Blade* isn't the last blade at all, because it's coming out again, see?

GBA NES CLASSICS? WE'VE GOT A POCKET FAMI

THERE'S A NEW HANDHELD THAT PLAYS NES GAMES AND IT'S NOT BY NINTENDO

We'll freely admit that Nintendo's recently released GBA NES Classics range isn't great value for money, but at least the cartridges are of a properly portable size.

Nevertheless, Fire International is confident that its recently announced Blaze Pocket Fami will prove to be a huge hit with retrogamers when it's released later this year. The handheld device has a 2.5-inch TFT screen, standard and auto-fire button configurations and will even allow you to connect it to an available television. Best of all, though, is the revelation that it will be able to play NES games from any region.

Admittedly, having a huge NES cartridge sticking out the back of the machine is likely to raise a few eyebrows, and it's unlikely to have any official seal of approval from Nintendo (*very* unlikely), but the ability to play *Kid Icarus* while sitting on the bus is bound to appeal to a few people.

Look out for a review in a future issue of **games™** Retro.



GAMING NEWS

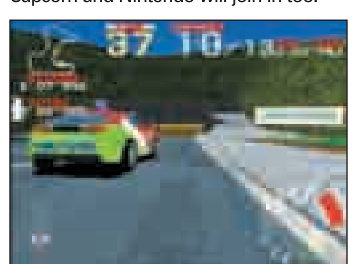
More Namco magic due

NAMCO TREATS THE PS2 TO MORE RETRO HITS

Not content with including *Tekken 1, 2, 3* and *Star Blade* in its recent *Tekken 5* package, Namco has revealed another *Museum* compilation.

Namco Museum is due for the PS2 in June and includes *Ridge Racer*, *Tekken*, *Klonoa*, *Ace Combat 2* and *Mr Driller*. There's little information available yet (we've no idea if they'll be PSone ports or the arcade originals, though we suspect the former) but it's great to see Namco proudly displaying its heritage for all to see. *Klonoa* in particular was superb fun, and considering it now costs over £40 on eBay, the new compilation clearly offers great value for money.

There's no UK release date yet, but there's no reason not to expect it by the end of the year. Namco, Sega and Midway are doing the retro scene proud at the moment, so hopefully Konami, Capcom and Nintendo will join in too.



The Invaders are coming

SPACE INVADERS ATTACK THE DS AND PSP

We like new consoles, but we love it when publishers are brave enough to release retro titles for them. Sometimes, the compilations are great value for money (*Mega Man Anniversary Collection*, for example) while others are shockingly bad (check out *Atari Retro Classics* on page 147).

It's now the turn of *Space Invaders* to hit the latest handhelds and, so far, both titles look pretty tempting. *Space Invaders Revolution* will allow Nintendo DS gamers to take on those blocky aliens at various locations and it already looks good. Plenty of new Invaders and weapons have been added to the traditional gameplay.

Space Invaders Pocket for the PSP is a more straightforward compilation of past *Space Invaders* titles and will include remakes of *Space Invaders*, *Space Invaders Part 2*, *Return Of The Invaders*, *Majestic 12 – Space Invaders Part IV* and *Space Invaders '95 – The Attack Of The Lunar Loonies*. It's not known if the original versions will be included, but we're certainly looking forward to seeing if the 'daddy of all shooters' still has what it takes when both games are released later this year.

LAST MONTH'S OCEAN SCREENSHOTS

1ST ROW	2ND ROW	3RD ROW	4TH ROW
Alien Breed 3D, Cavelon, Darkman, Gryzor, Jurassic Park, Mr Nutz: Hoppin' Mad, Operation Wolf, Rambo 3, Short Circuit, The Lost Patrol	Android 2, Donkey Kong, Knight Rider, Gutz, Combat School, Pang, Night Breed, Red Heat, Sleepwalker, The New Zealand Story	Batman, Chase HQ 2, Hook, Head Over Heels, Match Day, Rainbow Islands, Shadow Of The Beast, Robocop, Beach Volleyball, The Untouchables	Batman: The Caped Crusader, Batman: The Movie, Eskimo Eddie, Highlander, Mario Bros, Narc, Parasol Stars, V: The Computer Game, Smash TV, Toki
5TH ROW	**6TH ROW**	**7TH ROW**	**8TH ROW**
Navy Seals, Cool World, F-29 Retaliator, Elf, Lethal Weapon, Daley Thompson's Decathlon, Platoon, Robocop 3, Tai-Pan, Daley Thompson's Super Test	Chase HQ, Battle Command, Firefly, Hudson Hawk, Match Day 2, Mr Wimpy: The Hamburger Game, Pushover, Shadow Warriors, The Addams Family, Robocop 2	Sly Spy: Secret Agent, Transformers, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, Hyper Active, Miami Vice, N.O.M.A.D., Puzznic, Parallax, The Chinese Juggler, Wizball Lands, Zool 2	Cabal, Daley Thompson's Decathlete, Gilligan's Gold, It's A Knockout, Midnight Resistance, Operation Thunderbolt, Mutants, Run The Gauntlet, The Great Escape, WWF WrestleMania

Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro events...

MAY '05

Vampire Darkstalkers Collection

Date: 19 May **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** TBC

After the disappointing loading times of the PSP version, let's hope that the PS2 release of this compilation shares more in common with the Dreamcast Matching Service title. All the *Vampire Chronicle* games should be present and correct, so in our best Ant and Dec voices, 'let's get ready to rumble'.

Space Invaders Pocket

Date: 26 May **Publisher:** Taito **Price:** £26

Proving that the PSP isn't just about flashy visuals, Taito will be releasing a bumper *Space Invaders* compilation at the end of May. Included on the UMD will be remakes of *Space Invaders*, *Space Invaders Part 2*, *Return Of The Invaders*, *Super Space Invaders '91* and *Space Invaders '95*, so start saving

JUNE '05

Dragon Force

Date: 28 June **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** £16

Dragon Force was a superb strategy title on the Saturn and featured tense battles, hundreds of sprites on screen and increasingly strategic gameplay. As a result, we're more than interested to see what the PlayStation2 version has to offer.

AUGUST '05

Classic Gaming Expo (CGE)

Date: TBA **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA

Last year's event was attended by none other than Konami and Midway and proved to be a huge success. As the expo prepares to enter its eighth year, you can be sure that 2005's event will be even better.

SEPTEMBER '05

CGE UK

Date: 1-4 September **Location:** Excel, London **Price:** TBC

After the success of last year's event, we've been told that this year's CGE UK is going to be even bigger and has now moved to London's ExCel. Look out for guest appearances from Matthew Smith, Archer Maclean, Jeff Minter and several ex-Ocean staff. And that's just for starters....

Jagfest '05

Date: TBC **Location:** TBC **Price:** TBC

Details are still sketchy at the moment, but Jagfest UK should be returning this year. The event has been running for several years and has slowly been gathering momentum. If you're a fan of Atari's ill-fated console, check it out.

OCTOBER '05

Sega Classics Collection

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC

Sega's latest compilation features remakes of many of its classic arcade games and is available for PlayStation2. *Golden Axe*, *OutRun*, *Space Harrier*, *Bonanza Bros* and *Columns* are just a few of the games on offer. There's a strong chance it will be appearing in the UK so keep an eye out for it.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro Editor at darranj@paragon.co.uk

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE



WIZKID

WHO NEEDS BALLS WHEN YOU CAN HAVE LEGS?

Format: Amiga/Atari ST/PC
Release: 1992
Publisher: Ocean
Developers: Sensible Software

You could tell that *Wizkid* was an oddity before you even booted it up, if only because the manual told a story that, based on the premise of the game's predecessor, *Wizball*, couldn't possibly be. Wiz, the wizard from the first game, and the Wizball – an inanimate object that he travelled in – got married and had a son called Wizkid? And Nifta, Wiz's cat, had eight kittens despite being the only cat on the planet? You couldn't make it up… but Sensible Software could, and it threw in returning evil villain Zark and a tale of kidnapping and heroics.

Naturally, a story that refuses to follow the laws of common sense was the perfect premise for *Wizkid*, simply because the game took the same approach to its action. On the face of it, *Wizkid*'s gameplay was fairly simplistic, with the object of each level being to use Wizkid's head to dislodge floating blocks and drop them onto the enemies that filled each screen. If you ran out of blocks, the game let you move on before coming back for another try later. Clear all the stages in a single level and one of Nifta's kidnapped kittens would appear for you to collect before moving onto another stage.

But of course, there was a catch – by only using this method to sail through the levels, it was impossible to collect enough kittens and therefore have enough man- (or rather, cat-) power to row your boat over to Zark's castle before he shut the door. The only true way to rescue all the cats was to explore *Wizkid*'s adventure-based side, accessed by collecting coloured bubbles that filled in musical notes; these played a song when full and opened up the item shop. Here, you could buy seemingly pointless items (such as a carrot on a stick, a white elephant and a stick of TNT) with money earned from clearing stages, before reattaching Wizkid's head to his body and wandering the landscape in the background.

And that's where the madness really began. Clowns in stocks that you could trade with or drug with spiked cola, toilets that flooded if you used the wrong urinal, a freaky dog-girl-thing… finding all the interactive elements then having the right item for the job wasn't easy, although it was never impossible to find the 'correct' route through each stage.

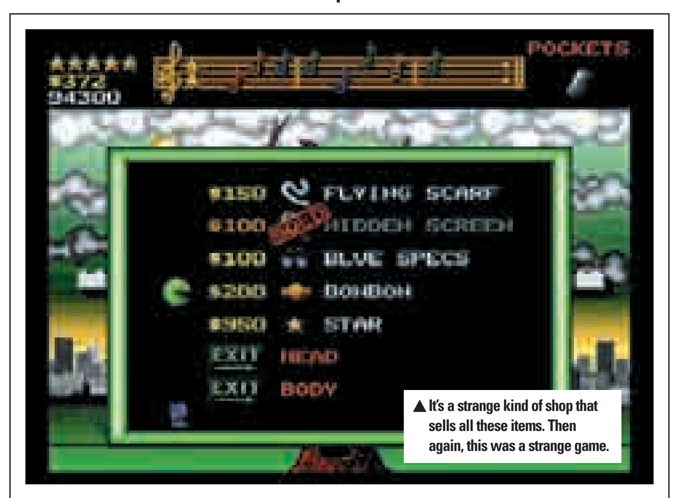
The thick vein of humour running through the game ensured the action was always fun, if somewhat surreal. Still, the whole thing was a damn sight better than the shoddy *Wizball* sequel we could have got. It might have been a completely different and off-the-wall game, but *Wizkid* stands out as one of Sensible Software's more imaginative efforts.

1+1=3

Much like onions and ogres, *Wizkid* was all about the layers: simplicity on top, with plenty of hidden material underneath… although you had to know where to look to find much of it. From Crossword 2091 (a bonus mini-game you could play to earn cash if you weren't doing too well) and the hidden screens that could be bought from the shop to the warps that could be taken through the game, you could always find something new. And don't get us started on the 255 'Secret Rooms' that were reached through the men's toilet on the first stage. Doing the maths required to find them all gave us a headache…



▲ Knock down the blocks with your flying head to kill enemies. What could be, er, simpler?



▲ It's a strange kind of shop that sells all these items. Then again, this was a strange game.

GREAT GAME BOSSES



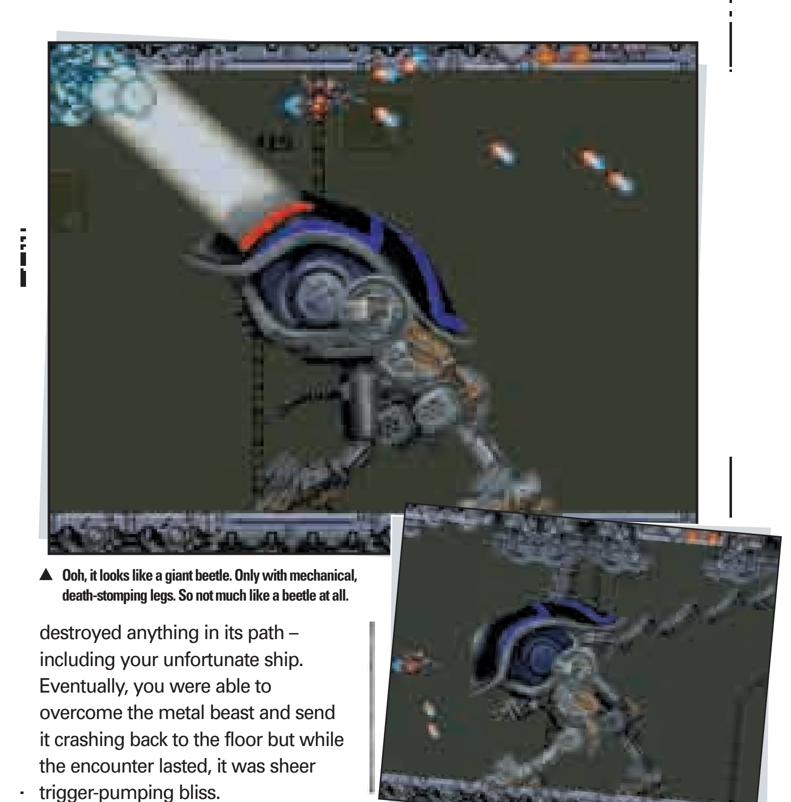
A•X•E•L•A•Y

Format: SNES
Release: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House

Konami's *Axelay* is filled with a superb selection of great bosses, but none can really compare with Level 2's *Robocop* ED-209 rip-off for sheer pant-wetting excitement.

Unlike the first level and all its Mode 7 malarkey, the second stage of *Axelay* was a more traditional side-scrolling 2D affair that saw you flying through what looked like a huge space station complete. Rather than disappoint, though, the incredibly creepy opening soundtrack (that explodes into one of *Axelay*'s best tunes) and strongly designed sprites simply urged you to continue playing to see what lay in store. As you moved deeper into the complex it soon became apparent that you were entering an abandoned part of the compound that had long been forgotten, and that's when you first saw it…

Linked up by power cables and looking like a giant mechanical foetus, a metallic giant slowly awoke. Throwing off its cables as easily as a dog would shake off fleas, the metal monstrosity started firing bullet after bullet from its huge cannon. As it moved slowly towards you, nifty flying was needed to ensure that you didn't get squashed by its huge bulk. Even when you had finally destroyed that huge cannon, the threat was far from over. A sickening blue glow slowly built up, only to be released as a huge beam of energy that destroyed anything in its path – including your unfortunate ship. Eventually, you were able to overcome the metal beast and send it crashing back to the floor but while the encounter lasted, it was sheer trigger-pumping bliss.



▲ Ooh, it looks like a giant beetle. Only with mechanical, death-stomping legs. So not much like a beetle at all.

VIDEOGAMES MYTHS

Reviving Aeris in Final Fantasy VII

Format: PlayStation
Release: 1997
Publisher: Squaresoft
Developer: in-House

Like that story about the serial killer phoning the babysitter from upstairs in the same house, certain videogaming urban myths have passed into the general consciousness. Naked Lara Croft, how to 'be' Goro… will the madness never end? Apparently not, as this *Final Fantasy VII* silliness shows.

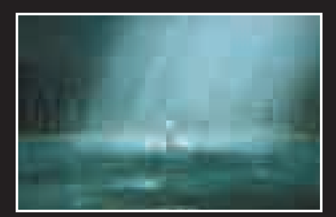
Before you all start frantically rummaging around for your *Final Fantasy VII* discs and old PSone saves, we'd just like to point out that Aeris cannot actually be brought back to life.

Having said that, it was pretty obvious why a story like this would circulate so quickly. The loss of Aeris was a pivotal part of many a gamer's life, and it's perhaps unsurprising that some wouldn't want to face the harsh reality of what actually happened at the end of that particular encounter with Sephiroth.

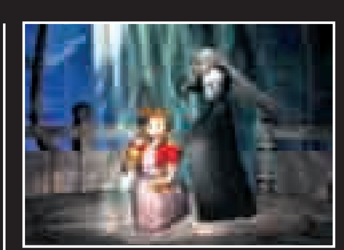
What was surprising, though, was the amount of amazingly complex methods of reviving Aeris that soon started to appear on various websites and forums. Many were hideously long-winded or required too much effort to input and suggested to gamers that they may have actually been true. Suffice to say, for those hardened individuals who were prepared to follow the painstakingly laid-out instructions, the end result was always the same – Aeris was dead for ever and she wasn't coming back.

It didn't matter how many limit breaks you had mastered, or how nice you were to her throughout the game – Aeris was gone and no amount of wishful thinking or difficult instructions would bring her back. Indeed, so much savagery and hatred erupted on some forums when it became apparent that Aeris was staying dead that one of the original tale spinners decided to come forward and admit that he had made everything up.

It may have been revealed as yet another tangle of falsehoods, but while it lasted, it fooled quite a few people. Um, us included…



▲ Try to maintain some British reserve, people. If you're going to sob hysterically, take it outside.



▲ Nope, sorry, nothing you can do can bring Aeris back. Even wishing *really* hard won't do it.





Why Don't They Remake…

COMBAT SCHOOL

"TODAY YOU PEOPLE ARE NO LONGER MAGGOTS. TODAY YOU ARE MARINES"

Format: **Arcade**
Release: **1987**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-House**

It was easy to work out which of your mates used to play *Combat School* – you just had to look at the kids who had one arm that was significantly more developed than the other… Frantic mothers worried about all the grunting and squeaking that was emanating from their sons' bedrooms would hastily fling the door open, only to find that their loved ones were hunched over their Kempston joysticks and swearing frantically at their TV screens, and not taking part in other more risqué activities.

Originally released in arcades in 1987, Konami's *Combat School* proved a refreshing alternative to its *Track & Field* series and won an army of fans thanks to its diverse gameplay and swish visuals. Taking on the role of one of two soldiers your aim was simple – survive bootcamp. Arm wrestling, a stamina-sapping Iron Man contest and a tough obstacle course all tested your physical skills, while the progressively more difficult firing ranges honed your reflexes to perfection. Of course, the sheer intensity of *Combat School* meant that most people were lucky if they got through the obstacle course on their first attempt, let alone finish the actual game. Indeed, we lost count of the number of ten pences that we used to cram into Konami's gruelling title – we could have probably afforded to buy the actual machine…



▲ Old-school graphics – perfect for recreating the blockiness of breezeblocks.



▲ Welcome to *Combat School*. Here you'll learn to change a tyre and eat a hot curry. Like a man.

The arcade version of the game used a trackball and you had to spin it like a man possessed if you want to make any sort of progression. Add a variety of obstacles of various heights that needed to be cleared and your arm would often feel like a dead weight by the time you were done. The precision required for the firing range, however, meant that you had to quickly regain control of your now useless limb, as even the stationary targets could be pretty tough to hit.

Despite the game's difficulty and the potential injuries it could cause (you could accidentally trap a bit of skin if you spun the trackball too hard) it was just so much fun to play. It was a great way of showing off your gaming prowess, as it took both skill and stamina to make it onto that all-important high-score board.

It was also treated to some superb home conversions (especially on the 8-bit systems) that required just as much skill and dedication. The Commodore 64 version in particular was absolutely fantastic and featured a rocking intro that really got the blood pumping. This awakening of adrenaline was needed as frantically rotating the joystick wasn't easy and would often require one person to take joystick duties, while a friend pressed the space bar to clear obstacles.



▲ Doubts were raised over the qualifications of the cut-price Olympic hurdle manufacturers.



▲ Meet Nick and Joe: two rough, tough – yet slightly fey – roister-doisterers if ever we saw them.

Despite this minor setback, *Combat School* remained a favourite after-school challenge and bought out the competitiveness in even the meekest of individuals.

So that sets us nicely up for an update. Thanks to peripherals like dance mats, the EyeToy and various lightguns, a new version of *Combat School* could have serious potential. Imagine having to run on the spot like a lunatic and having the EyeToy capture your jumps in order to clear each course's obstacles. You could also flail your arms like a madman to simulate the boat-rowing sections in the Iron Man race, or maybe even sit down and pretend you're actually rowing – the possibilities are endless…

Then, of course, you have the firing ranges… There are plenty of different guns available for both the PS2 and Xbox, so you'd be spoilt for choice. Even the DS could get in on the action, as it should be easy to emulate a trackball on the second screen. Hell, the more we think about it, the more *Combat School* has to happen, and happen now. We'd better start working on those patents…

Great RETRO Gaming Moments

IT'S TIME TO FORGET THAT BROTHERLY LOVE…

DOUBLE DRAGON

Format: Arcade
Release: 1986
Publisher: Technos/Taito
Developer: Technos Japan Corp

You've got to love those Lee brothers. They might be a little dim (they leave their car in the garage and set off after the bad guys on foot) but they sure won't take any shit. But then, when your nearest and dearest (the lovely Marian) has just been punched in the gut and dragged off by some gun-toting bad guys you'd do the same… wouldn't you?

Seedy back alleys – complete with whip-wielding ladies of the night – and dangerous industrial areas were just a few of the locations that the brothers had to kick, punch and throw their way through, and then there's that dodgy bridge jump in the forest to worry about… Fortunately, the brothers had a decent variety of moves at their disposal and damn if they're weren't going to put each and every one of them to good use (although, in truth, a simple headbutt or elbow would get you through the entire game).

As they progressed through eerie forests and along precarious cliff tops their goal was finally in sight, but that, of course, presented its own little problem. Facing off against Big Boss Willy wasn't the most challenging aspect of the game (his gun's bullets were surprisingly easy to dodge) but Technos' next curveball definitely hit you for six.

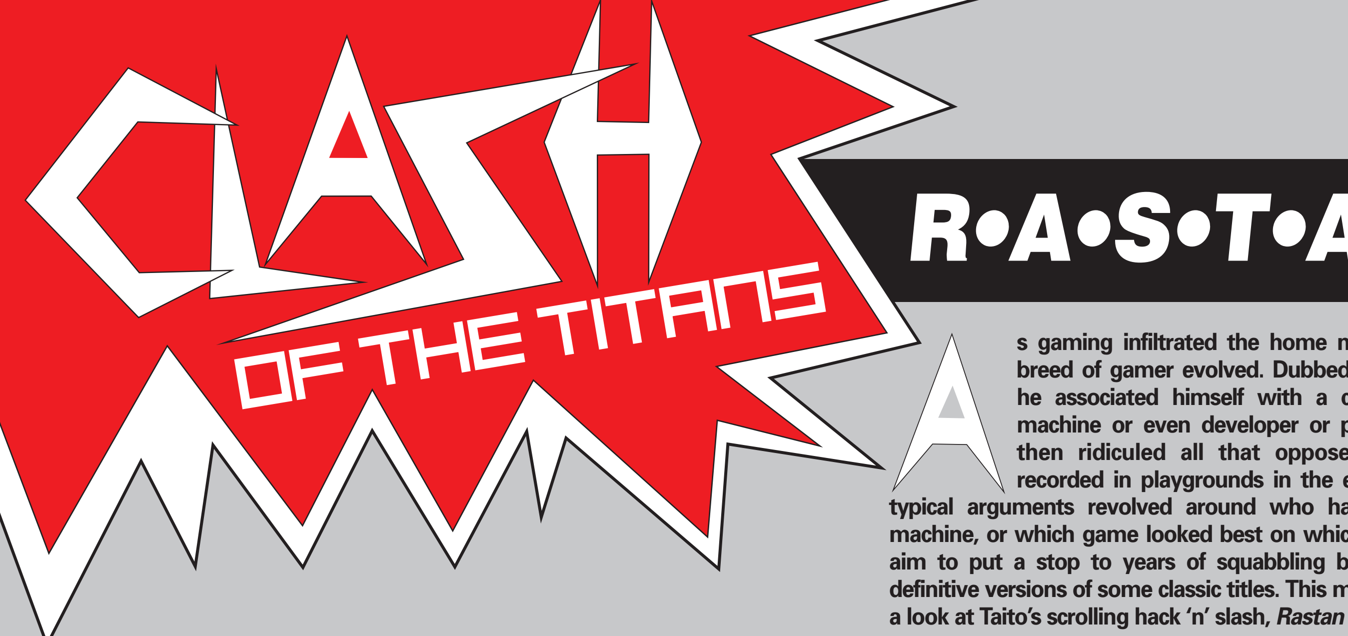
Willy was defeated, Marian was still tied up, and yet the fight wasn't actually finished – one more opponent still stood in your way – your brother. What happened next was pure gaming gold; both players frantically beat the hell out of each other with whatever weapons were available, be it fist, foot or baseball bat.

The victor got the girl and a big smacker on the lips; the loser became just another casualty of the brothers' rampage.

▼ Fight the evil-doers of the world, then fight your brother. It's almost, um, Shakespearean?







R•A•S•T•A•N

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month we take a look at Taito's scrolling hack 'n' slash, *Rastan*

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: The C64 version of *Rastan* is a bit of a love/hate affair. While we're impressed with the well-drawn sprites and decent animation, it's let down by some very slow scrolling that kills the pace of the gameplay. It's also rather chunky looking, but this suits the game. Add some decent backgrounds and the C64 is off to a good start.

SPECTRUM: We're pleasantly surprised by the Spectrum 128 conversion of *Rastan*. All the sprites are nice and big and are extremely similar to the original arcade creations. Granted, the sprites don't actually feature any colour (everything simply takes on the colour of whatever background it's moving past) but this is still a very strong effort.

AMSTRAD: While the sprites are recognisable, the simple backgrounds are a real disappointment and make *Rastan* look very basic. On the other hand, the lack of detail means everything scrolls at a cracking pace and it runs rings around the laboured C64 effort. It's a close call but the C64 wins the first round.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: Martin Galway did an excellent job with the C64's SID chip, so *Rastan* sounds very nice indeed. While the ambient title music is worth a couple of listens, it's the tune that runs during the game that truly impresses. Bold and brash, it perfectly captures the on-screen action and is enhanced by some great spot effects.

SPECTRUM: Not only is there a reasonably faithful rendition of the arcade music on the title screen, it continues throughout the main game (on the 128k version, at least). Granted, it's not going to give the C64 any sleepless nights, but it's a hell of a lot better than the sorry Amstrad effort and won't have you reaching for the volume control. Second place, then..

AMSTRAD: Well, you get a decent tune at the beginning of the game, but after that everything goes downhill. There's no music at all while you're playing the game and the infrequent spot effects are pathetic. Considering the Amstrad's visuals are pretty good, it's a shame that the music is so poor.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: Despite some excellent aesthetics, the C64 is let down by sluggish scrolling that takes the sheen off this great hack 'n' slash title. It's a shame, as everything else makes the grade; controls are responsive, jumping gaps is never a problem and everything is faithful to the original.

SPECTRUM: It may look and sound rather nice, but playing *Rastan* on the Spectrum is quite a painful experience, mainly due to its unresponsive and clunky controls. It's very easy to mistime jumps, and certain moves like the downward slash are practically impossible to pull off. It may be a bit of a looker, but the Spectrum version doesn't have all the moves.

AMSTRAD: There's no denying that the Amstrad version is a slick mover, but it's hampered by its control system. Unlike the C64 and Spectrum games, this outing uses a separate button to jump. This may be like the arcade version, but the clunkiness means you'll yearn for a simpler system.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

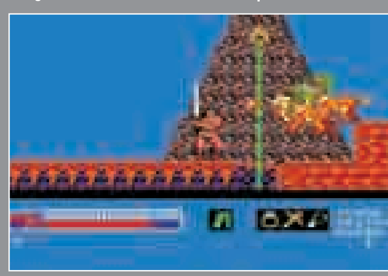
AND THE WINNER IS...

C64

Okay, so it's slightly slower compared to its 8-bit counterparts, but everything else is perfectly acceptable. Superb music, impressive visuals and some wonderfully tight gameplay mean that *Rastan* on the C64 is this month's deserved winner. Yet another triumph for the wonder machine.

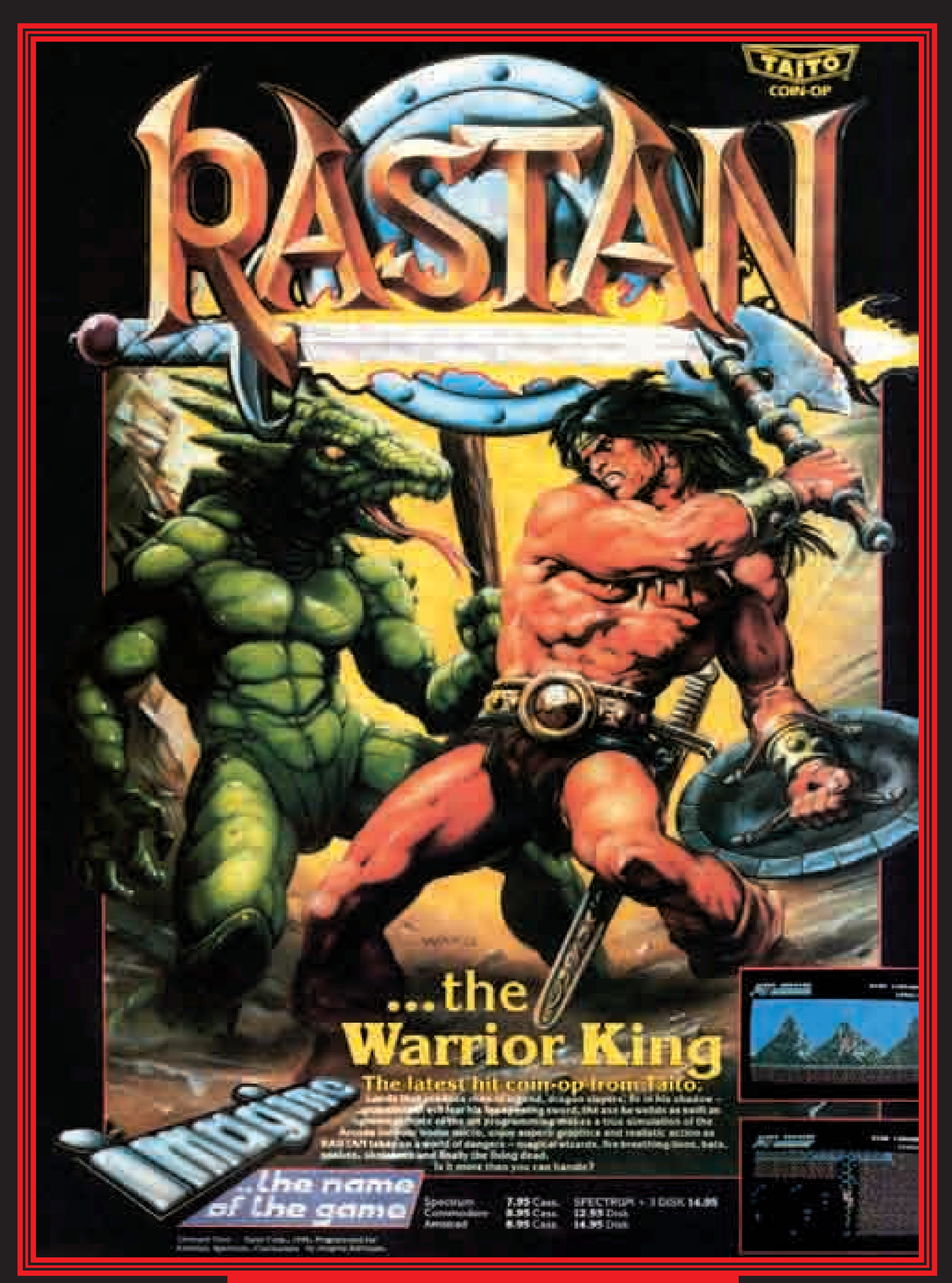


Congratulations to C64 *Rastan*, which triumphs this month.



Ya-boo to the Spectrum version (below) which makes us sad.





RASTAN (Various Home Systems) Imagine, 1988 – UK advertisement



He likes to score...

An interview with... WALTER DAY OF TWIN GALAXIES

THINK YOU'RE GOOD AT GAMES? YOU'RE NOTHING UNTIL YOU'VE MADE IT ONTO THE TWIN GALAXIES HIGH-SCORE BOARD. MEET THE MAN WHO GOT THE WHOLE THING STARTED...



▲ Walter Day: the Norris McWhirter of the gaming world, except he wears a cool referee's shirt – just so you know what it is he does…

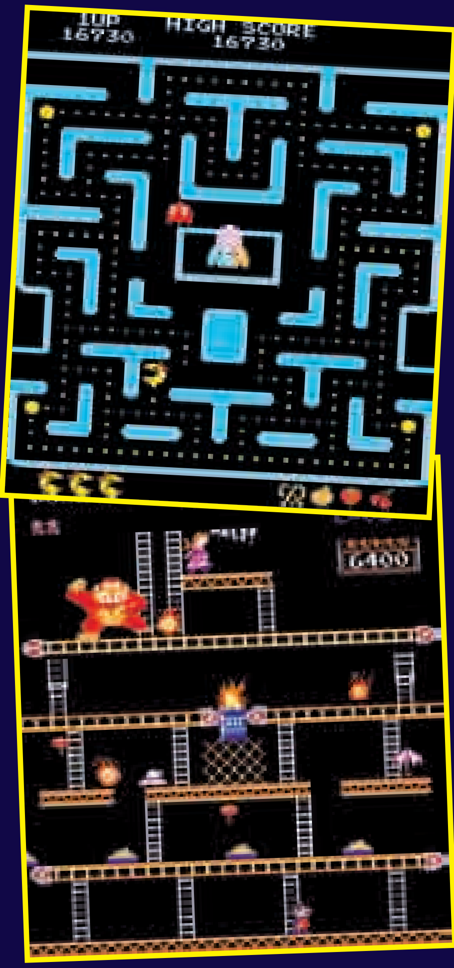
Many years ago, Walter Day had a vision. In 1981 the 32-year-old travelling salesman journeyed through 15 US states and visited over 100 arcades in order to collate as many arcade high scores as possible. By the end of the year he had opened his own arcade, Twin Galaxies, and the collated scores were made public as the Twin Galaxies National Scoreboard.

Although the actual arcade has long since disappeared, Twin Galaxies itself lives on and it's now recognised as the official referee for videogame high scores. No matter what your score on *Galaxian* or *Pac-Man* is, it won't matter one bit until it's nestling snugly on the Twin Galaxies leaderboard. After UK gamer Gary Whelan recently beat the *Galaxian* world record, we thought it was about time that we had a chat with Day and found out more about his lifelong passion.



TWIN GALAXIES
INTERNATIONAL SCOREBOARD

JODY CAGLE
STEVE SANDERS
BRIGGS MILLER
PETER ZEMKE
JOEL WEST
SHAWN DYBDAHL
KEN FRENCH
DON BERNARD
BRAD WILEBSKI
LEO DANIELS
SCOTTY WILLIAMS
SLATE THOMPSON
JAY BENNETT
MARK ROBICHEK
KEVIN BAUGHAN
SCOTTY WILLIAMS



▲ Some classic titles have high scores that haven't been beaten for over 20 years, and it's not just arcade games that are record-breaking.

The interview

games™: How did you first get interested in computer games?

Walter Day: I first became addicted when I discovered *Space Invaders* in May 1980. I just couldn't stop playing it. Then, in early 1981, I started playing *Pac-Man*. Eventually, I opened Twin Galaxies as an excuse to play more videogames without actually feeling guilty about it.

g™: What sort of games did Twin Galaxies house and did you keep any of them?

WD: Twin Galaxies opened on 10 November, 1981 with 22 games and included all the usual suspects such as *Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Tempest, Centipede* and *Frogger*. When we opened the cash boxes for the first time, the *Frogger* game had earned $420 and the *Berzerk* game $410 – it was the 'golden age' of the videogame arcade and I loved every minute of it. Twin Galaxies eventually closed on 6 March, 1984. Sadly, I don't actually have any of the machines now; I just exist in an office in order to run the scoreboard.

g™: How popular was Twin Galaxies when it was first formed?

WD: Very popular – at one stage, it was the centre of the gaming universe. Players would come from many different countries and we'd get over 100 phone calls a day, quite often including calls from up to eight different countries each day.

g™: What sort of media coverage did Twin Galaxies use to receive?

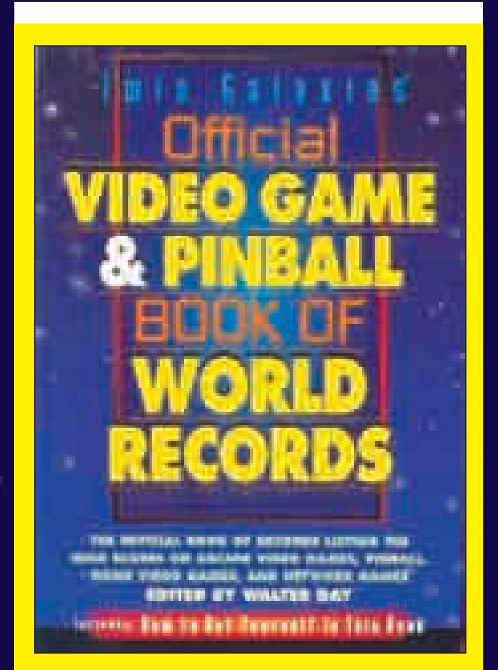
WD: It was very extensive at one stage. During the period 1982-1985, we were appearing on the news almost every other day. *Life* magazine, Marvel Comics, *USA Today, Washington Post, Philadelphia Inquirer* and ABC-TV's *That's Incredible* show are just a few of the magazines and TV shows that Twin Galaxies appeared on.

g™: What possessed you to travel over 10,000 miles in order to collate all the arcade high scores you wanted? How expensive was it and what did your family think about it?

WD: Fortunately, I was single at the time, so my wife wasn't a consideration. Today, my girlfriend doesn't really know what to make of it. You have to realise, though, that back in 1981 I was in love with videogames and was able to turn my business trips into tours of all the local arcades. I was looking for the greatest champions of the era – which is what Twin Galaxies is still about – as I wanted to honour the greatest players and crown them as the royalty of the 'videogame age'. Sure it cost a hell of a lot to travel... but I'd do it again today without a second thought.



He likes to score...



THE BIG BOOK OF RECORDS

Another aspect of Twin Galaxies is Day's *Twin Galaxies' Official Video Game & Pinball Book of World Records*. It's a fascinating read, is filled with a ridiculous amount of high scores and contains plenty of interesting and often highly amusing anecdotes.

Although Day is still hard at work putting the finishing touches to an all-new three volume set, the original edition is still available to purchase from Twin Galaxies' website. The $30 asking price may sound a little steep, but if you've any interest at all in high scores and retrogaming, you'll find it an essential purchase.

gTM: Did any arcade owners have any problems with you taking down scores?

WD: Well, there was one time an arcade felt worried that I was checking them out with plans to open a rival arcade in their small town of Trenton, Missouri. Without warning, they shut off all the electricity and asked me to leave. On another occasion, I was surrounded by a group of people who wanted to know why I was counting all their games – after I told them they threw me out.

gTM: Were there any patterns to the high scores you came across?

WD: To be honest, the great players were widely dispersed throughout the US. There does seem to be this illusion that the top players congregated in California, North Carolina and Florida, but this was simply because of the high concentrations of population in such areas. Videogame champions popped up anywhere and everywhere.

gTM: What sort of ages are the record holders? Are they mostly youngsters, or are there a few older record holders out there?

WD: Videogame players are usually in their twenties to thirties. In my experience, younger players can't actually hold their own against older players because of a lack of motor or mental development. I'm not trying to be controversial, it's simply a general rule that has held up now for over 25 years. There are always exceptions, of course. Usually, the older and younger players don't play the same games, so it's sometimes hard to always accurately compare them.

gTM: What sort of support do you receive from the industry? Are you ever loaned machines, or given any for prizes?

WD: Support has always been very good. Atari, Williams, Midway, Taito, Universal, Stern, Nintendo, Exidy and Sega initially supported the scoreboard. Midway sent us our first high score referral on 8 February, 1982. During the summer of 1983, Sega loaned us copies of *Star Trek*, *Championship Baseball*, *Congo Bongo* and *Buck Rogers* for long-term use, while Williams loaned us multiple machines of *Bubbles*, *Moon Patrol*, *Sinistar*, *Motorace USA* and *Robotron*. Finally, Exidy sent us two copies of *Crossbow* to use extensively. Manufacturers paid for many contest prizes and expenses in the 1983-1985 era – that's when we received the most support.

gTM: What types of games tend to work best for high score challenges?

WD: Over 90 per cent of games created so far have a high-score modality and Twin Galaxies exists to monitor all these scores long after even the manufacturers have abandoned them. Twin Galaxies is the historical repository of the history of gaming. Long after a manufacturer has gone out of business, we will still be there continuing to support their games and monitor the world records on these now orphaned titles.

gTM: What are the more popular titles that people try to beat records on?

WD: It runs the gamut now, although the older systems are once again regaining popularity: NES, Colecovision and Atari 2600 are all being logged at the moment, and we're also busy verifying scores for the PS2, Xbox, GameCube, Nintendo DS and PSP.

gTM: Why do you think Twin Galaxies has become so popular over the years?

WD: I think it's because it fills the needs of the time. Videogaming will be the biggest sport in the world someday, and Twin Galaxies plays a humble role as the official statistical historian for the hobby while it's in these first formative years. The database of statistics we are maintaining is the historical database that future generations of players will consider the official records generated by the industry during its infancy.

gTM: When did your collaboration with the *Guinness Book Of Records* begin?

WD: It started off in the early Eighties and we were very close. For some years I retired and, during my absence, the relationship with Guinness eventually dissolved. Now, though, we are once again very close with Guinness and are currently working on several projects together.

gTM: Are you still running regular competitions in the US, and are there any plans to bring any Twin Galaxies events to the UK or Europe?

WD: Yes, we plan many contests but I've been avoiding them right now because I'm focusing all my attention on the forthcoming book of records. It will be a three-volume set covering the history of gaming in addition to the high scores and contest results. We plan on bringing major events to the UK as soon as we get sponsors.

gTM: Gary Whelan became a bit of a gaming celebrity in the UK when he broke the *Galaxian* high-score record. What's the oldest unbeaten record you have and has anyone come close to beating it?

WD: *Asteroids* has been held by Scott Safran since 13 November, 1982 while *Gorf* has been held by Todd Rogers since 24 November, 1982. Of course, there are many other titles, but these are the most prominent.

gTM: Got any unusual high-score stories?

WD: Well, the oldest man to be world champion

"SOMETIMES WE WATCH A GAME A FRAME AT A TIME TO MAKE SURE THERE'S NO CHEATING"



▲ *"That, my friend, is a winning score. Not 65 on Snake."* Walter Day sets another prospective record holder straight.

on a legacy game – a game that has a long history with many challengers – was John Lawton of Weirs Beach. At the age of 72 he won the *Depth Charge* title with 4,420 points. That was on 3 June, 2003 and he's still unbeaten.

gTM: How many scores are submitted each month?

WD: That's increasing remarkably right now. I spend all day every day putting in scores. I've put in a few thousand this month alone, with many of them being part of a backlog that goes back years.

gTM: Do you have many problems with people cheating, and, if so, how do you deal with the problem?

WD: All the time, unfortunately, especially from the younger players. They haven't developed their sense of fair play yet and are really smart and can see the angles on how to beat the game unfairly. Also, there is a bad element on the internet that gives people the impression that 'getting away with things is cool'. Another contributing factor are the manufacturers that have developed a culture of cheats and codes. Unfortunately, they program games with bugs we have to watch for; sometimes it's necessary for us to watch a game a frame at a time to make sure no cheating has occurred.

gTM: Do you play many games yourself and have you set any records on the Twin Galaxies site?

WD: In the Eighties I was rather good at *Galaxian*, *Gorf*, *Make Trax* and *Centipede*; I actually got 313,000 on *Ms. Pac-Man* in 1984. Sadly, I no longer play now because I'm so busy with the scoreboard.

gTM: What do you think about the current interest in retro gaming?

WD: All games become retro games eventually. When a manufacturer creates a game, they usually just support it for a few months and then move onto the next title (especially nowadays). Therefore, within a few months, every game loses its player base as the players, as if in a large herd, move onto the next highly hyped release from the manufacturers.

Twin Galaxies is the 'elephants' graveyard of gaming'. As each game enters the forgotten 'Twilight Zone' of the past, we establish official rules, verify submissions and crown the champions. In time, we will support all 100,000-plus titles.

So, retro gaming will continue to grow, because in time every player playing today's GameCube will be considered a retro gamer because the herd has left him or her behind. At some point it will become unfair to call a gamer a retro gamer, because more people will be playing the relics of the past than the current releases, merely through the huge impact of there being hundreds of thousands of old favourites to chose from, as opposed to the few hundred being released new every month.

gTM: If we were trying to set a record, what tips could you give us?

WD: Don't cheat, drink your milk and meditate regularly.

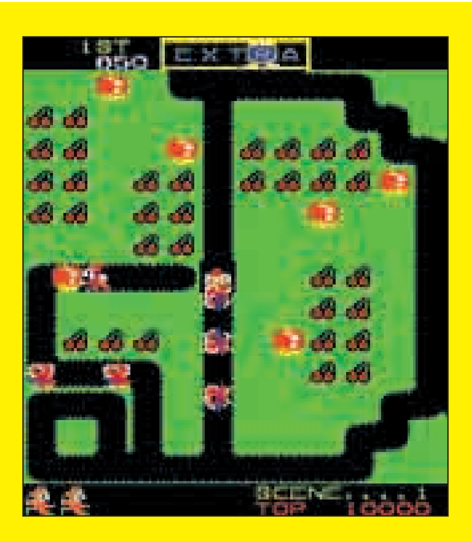


IT'S ALL IN THE SCORE...

If you fancy your chances at beating the elite then you've got your work cut out. Some of the scores shown below have taken years of dedication to achieve, so you may want to start practising straight away, as you're unlikely to beat any after a few hours of play.

SPACE INVADERS: 48,480 – Perry Rodgers
GALAXIAN: 399,290 – Gary S Whelan
PAC-MAN: 3,333,360 – Billy Mitchell
GALAGA: 15,999,990 – Stephen Krogman
FROGGER: 442,330 – Mark Robichek
MS PAC-MAN: 920,310 – Chris Ayra
TEMPEST: 1,728,329 – Hector C Vasquez
BREAKOUT : 896 – Zack Hample
ZOO KEEPER: 21,849,650 – Shawn Cram

All scores were set on the original arcade machines and are based on the factory default settings.



Namco Museum

The 'pick up and play' nature of titles like *Pac-Man* and *Dig Dug* means they're well suited to the gamer on the move, and Namco has been quick to release them on the PSP as part of its *Namco Museum* collection.

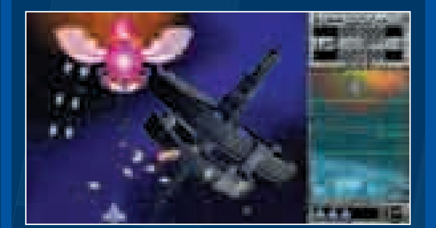
The compilation includes seven classic titles and four updated arrangements. The original titles are *Pac-Man, Ms Pac-Man, Galaxian, Galaga, Dig Dug, Rally-X* and *New Rally-X* and all play exactly as you remember them – it's even possible to rotate your PSP through 90 degrees to play titles like *Galaga* on the right screen orientation. Another useful option is the ability to send the original games to any available PSP (though you can't play multiplayer games this way).

We won't review the originals, as you should all know what they're like by now, but you'll want to know how those 'arrangements' have turned out…

Format: PSP **Price:** ¥5,260
Publisher/Developer: Namco
Release: TBA (Japan: Out Now)

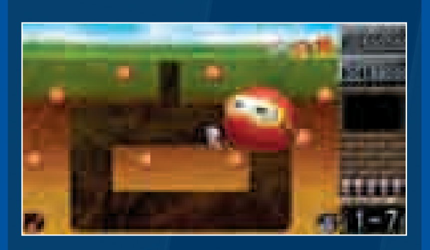
GALAGA ARRANGEMENT

This is easily the best game on the compilation and *Galaga* fans should be very happy with this excellent update. The visuals are top notch, the quirky tunes are as good as ever and the gameplay is wonderfully hectic. While early levels are fairly straightforward, the game soon explodes into a kaleidoscope of colour as more enemies rapidly fill the screen. There's a great selection of power-ups, some fantastic looking bosses and, unlike the other titles, it's bloody rock hard to boot, which means that it's going to be something you continually revisit.



DIG DUG ARRANGEMENT

Like the other 'arranged' titles, *Dig Dug* has been suitably enhanced over the original arcade game and features plenty of interesting extras and some neat power-ups. It would have been nice if the music only played as you moved around the play area (as it does in the original game) but that's a minor quibble and doesn't affect the gameplay in any way. *Dig Dug* has received a new lease of life and is all the better for it. Granted, there's not enough here to make it stand up on its own, but it's still a worthy addition to the collection.



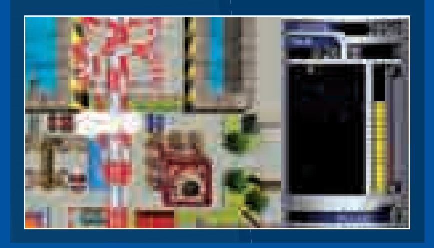
PAC-MAN ARRANGEMENT

It takes a while to get used to *Pac-Man*'s new isometric display, but once you do, you'll find it a surprising amount of fun. Plenty of additions like teleport pads, speed-ups and lifts spice up the traditional gameplay, and it's even possible to create a clone to make gobbling ghosts even easier. Namco has also included a selection of wacky ghost bosses to face off against – while that might sound bizarre, it actually works pretty well. New *Pac-Man* is rather simple, but if you can resist the infinite continues you'll find this new-look classic a pleasant diversion.



RALLY-X ARRANGEMENT

Like *Pac-Man, Rally-X Arrangement* initially suffers because of its somewhat disorientating viewpoint. Get past this, however, and you'll find that this is yet another impressive update. The little flourishes that have been added don't really impress as much as those of the other arrangements, but it's still a very enjoyable effort. Like *Dig Dug* and *Pac-Man*, it won't take long to complete (especially if you use the infinite credits that Namco has annoyingly included), but if you're looking for a fast-paced title then you shouldn't be too disappointed.



VERDICT

We're pleasantly surprised with *Namco Museum*. Okay, so we've seen the games countless times before on various other compilations, but they're actually well suited to the PSP. It's not an essential purchase by any means, but if you're a Namco fan, you're unlikely to be disappointed.

OVERALL SCORE 72%



MS PAC-MAN (Arcade) Midway, 1981 – Original arcade flyer

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

ARE ALL-IN-ONE JOYSTICKS ACTUALLY ANY GOOD?

OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS, PLUG 'N' PLAY DEVICES HAVE STARTED TO BECOME EXTREMELY POPULAR. The ability to connect them directly to any television set and play a variety of classic games has proved too good to resist, and it's now possible to find a range of products in game and toy stores around the country. Most offer unadulterated versions of home-console classics, and the integral joysticks are often fashioned after an old-school model. But are these devices any good? We take a look at four of the more popular efforts…

COMMODORE 64DTV

Price: £29.99

Games: *Impossible Mission, Jumpman Junior, Cybernoid, Paradroid, Pitstop, Tower Toppler, Eliminator, Firelord, Summer Games, Super Cycle, Ranarama, Zynaps, World Karate Champion A, Sumo Wrestling, Sword Of Fargoal, Impossible Mission 2, Cyberdyne Warrior, Cybernoid II, Gateway To Apshai, Pitstop 2, Uridium, Surfing, Flying Disk, Winter Games, Silicon Warrior, Speedball, Bull Riding, World Karate Champion B, Championship Wrestling, Exelon*



▶ Now you can use your high-definition, widescreen, plasma television to see blocky snow.

Joystick: The Kempston Competition Pro was always our joystick of choice in the good old days (although we had a soft spot for the Cruiser) so it's a delight to be able to get to grips with it again. Granted, it's not 100 per cent accurate, but it's still very hard to fault as far as authenticity is concerned. We did find that it hurt our hands after a while, but this is probably down to our oversized mitts (we certainly never had problems when we were nippers).

The Games: Some of the games may be long past their sell-by date, but there are still a surprising amount of solid titles on the 64DTV. *Uridium, Winter Games, Zynaps, Cybernoid 1* and *2*, and *Impossible Mission 1* and *2* are still as fresh today as when we first played them, although many of the *World Games* titles (naughtily passed off as full games) are really starting to show their age. Still, there's a good number of quality games on offer and fans of Hewson are going to be ecstatic.

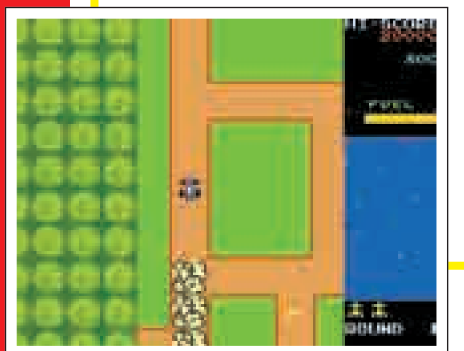
Value For Money: Take a glance at the back of the box and the Commodore 64DTV looks like excellent value for money. Once you dig a little deeper, though, you'll find that several games have had all their events split up and passed off as individual titles – very cheeky. Still, this is a very well presented package and the majority of games are C64 classics, making this a worthy purchase.

SCORE 4/5

NAMCO ARCADE CLASSICS 1

Price: £19.99

Games: *Pac-Man, Bosconian, Dig Dug, Rally-X, Galaxian*



Joystick: If there's one thing Namco's joystick manages to do, it's capture the vibrancy of the arcade scene from the early Eighties. The purple and yellow design is very eye-catching and comes complete with some very tasty art. Sadly, the stick itself is extremely uncomfortable and will cause your hand to ache after extended use. Its primary colours are also likely to attract small children and wasps, so be careful where you leave it…

The Games: The hardware may be disappointing, but the games themselves are surprisingly solid and represent some of Namco's greatest gaming moments. *Pac-Man* (despite not being truly arcade perfect) is a classic, *Galaxian* will allow you to try to beat Gary Whelan's recent world-record high score, and *Rally X* is a great way to while away a few hours. *Bosconian* and *Dig Dug* are the only weak links, but even these are still good titles.

Value For Money: The Namco stick has been out for an age now so can be bought relatively cheaply. It's certainly one of the strongest plug 'n' play titles that you can currently get and if you don't mind the poor composite picture (a problem with all these devices) then this is definitely worth considering. Despite claims to the contrary, the games aren't arcade perfect, but unless you own the original machine you'd never know.

Pick it up and relive your youth. If only there were a few more games on it…

SCORE 3/5



SCORE 2/5

ATARI 10-IN-1

Price: £24.99
Games: *Asteroids, Adventure, Missile Command, Centipede, Gravitar, Yar's Revenge, Breakout, Pong, Circus Atari, Real Sports Volleyball*
Joystick: While it's much more comfortable to hold than the Namco stick, this Atari effort isn't without its problems. The biggest drawback is that the stick itself feels really flimsy and you get the impression that it could fall apart in your hands at any second. Otherwise, though, this is a fairly faithful recreation of the original Atari stick and is sure to bring a tear of nostalgia to any fan's eye.
The Games: They may be showing their age in terms of aesthetics, but there are still some playable gems here. While the likes of *Centipede, Missile Command, Asteroids* and *Battle Zone* are definitely worth playing, many of the titles now verge on the unplayable and will be quickly skipped. Good, but not great.
Value For Money: The problem with many of these devices is that the original machines (C64, Spectrum, whatever) and games can normally be picked up for around the same sort of price. Still, if space is a premium and you have money to burn, then you'll find the Atari 10-in-1 a great way to spend a few hours. Just don't expect to be hammering away on it in a month's time…

▼ These are worth missing *The Antiques Roadshow* for. Hell, most of these games *are* antiques.



ARCADE LEGENDS: STREET FIGHTER II: SPECIAL CHAMPION EDITION

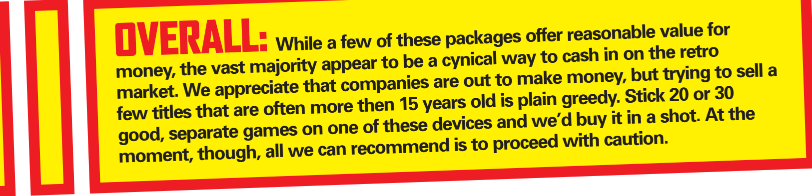
Price: £29.99
Games: *Street Fighter II: Special Champion Edition, Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*
Joypad: Now this is very nice. You get two six-button pads for your £30, and while they feel rather cheap to hold they perform really well. Pulling off Dragon Punches and Fireballs is incredibly easy and though the pad itself feels rather lightweight the buttons work very well indeed. This is a vast improvement over all the sticks we've tested and it's easy to see why joypads are so popular nowadays.
The Games: Considering we have two arcade games on this pad – *Street Fighter II Championship Edition* and *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* – it's a real shame that neither is the original arcade version. Even with the optimal speed settings, *Street Fighter II* on the Mega Drive now feels incredibly clunky and hasn't aged at all well. *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* is slightly better, but again, this should have been the original arcade game, not a port (and one that's inferior to the SNES game).
Value For Money: £30 for two dated Mega Drive games? Don't make us laugh… Sadly, Radica is deadly serious and this latest release marks a worrying change of direction for plug 'n' play games. It's bad enough that we're not even given the original arcade versions, but having to pay so much for them is a crime. Considering you can buy an Xbox version of *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* for £30, this is nothing more than a greedy attempt to make a fast buck at the retro gamer's expense.



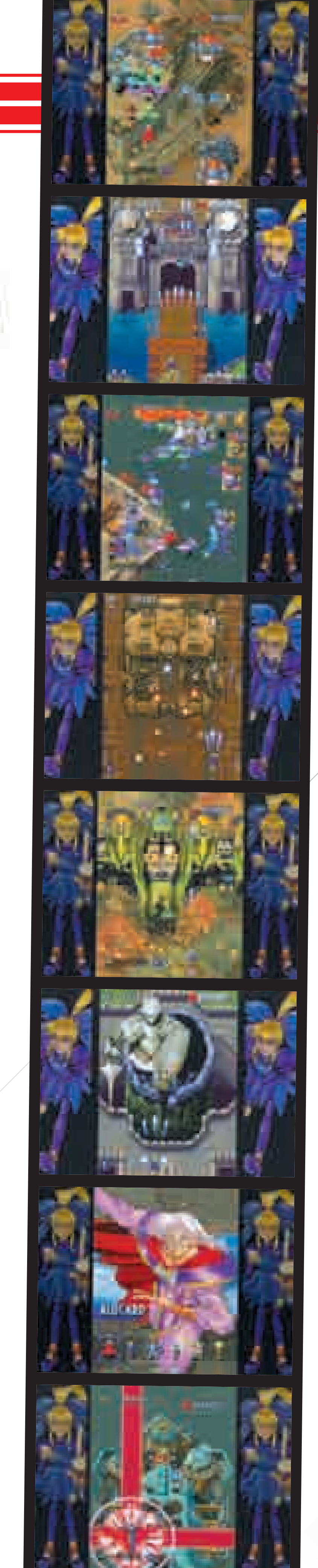
▲ So do you pay £30 for several awesome versions of *Street Fighter II*, or £30 for one not so good version? Hmm…



SCORE 1/5



OVERALL: While a few of these packages offer reasonable value for money, the vast majority appear to be a cynical way to cash in on the retro market. We appreciate that companies are out to make money, but trying to sell a few titles that are often more then 15 years old is plain greedy. Stick 20 or 30 good, separate games on one of these devices and we'd buy it in a shot. At the moment, though, all we can recommend is to proceed with caution.



GUNBIRD
SPECIAL EDITION

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Xplosiv
Developer: Psikyo
Release: Out now
Price: £9.99
Games: *Gunbird, Gunbird 2*

The PlayStation2 is currently having a blast (ahem) when it comes to unadulterated shmups. *Gradius V*, *R-Type Final* and *Steel Dragon EX* are just are few of the titles available in the UK and that's without even considering the impressive amount of shooters that are currently out in Japan. Empire has already released *Psyvariar* on its Xplosiv budget label and it's now decided to release both *Gunbird* games for a mind-bogglingly low £9.99. That's fantastic value for money and it's something that we'd like to see happen with many more retro titles in the future.

While the *Gunbird* franchise (or *Mobile Light Command*, as it was known over here) is by no means Psikyo's finest moment, both titles still deliver plenty of those all-important thrills and spills. They're also fiendishly difficult and if you stay away from the infinite credits you may struggle at first to finish even the opening stages. Sure, neither game is a frantic bullet-fest like *Do Don Pachi* or *Batsugan*, but they're still as tough as old boots and will present plenty of challenges for the unseasoned gamer.

This difficulty is mainly due to the lack of a hitbox on your chosen character, meaning that you'll be unable to graze bullets like you can in more recent titles. Even the briefest of bullet touches will cause your character to fall to his or her doom, and as you face off against the massive bosses you'll find things become even tougher. Luckily, holding down the fire button for a set amount of time will release a more powerful shot, and if that fails to stop the enemy in its tracks there are always your devastating smart bombs to rely on…

And that's *Gunbird* in a nutshell – it's a simple, no-frills shooter. But while it's still an enjoyable blaster, it is starting to show its age – mainly because it offers none of the complex scoring systems or attack waves that have appeared in more recent titles. Fortunately, things pick up significantly with the sequel, and although *Gunbird 2* still lacks the complexity of later shooters, there's still plenty to enjoy. Like *Gunbird*, *Gunbird 2* features solid, well-drawn sprites, cute anime-styled characters and a selection of fantastically drawn mech bosses. There's an additional short-range attack (although the increased amount of bullets makes it hard to use) and the various bosses have been boosted in difficulty due to their more complex bullet patterns.

Despite these much-needed additions, there are bound to be a few gamers who'll still sneer at *Gunbird 2*'s old-school play mechanics, short levels and infinite continues, even with its bargain price tag. It's a shame, as Xplosiv has done its best to ensure *Gunbird: Special Edition* appeals to the more hardcore gamer. Both games are in 60Hz and also include their original Tate modes (meaning you can turn your TV on its side to properly emulate the original arcade games). When you throw these tasty features into the equation, both games for a paltry £10 seems like a steal. If you're looking for an entry into the world of shmups, you'll find *Gunbird: Special Edition* to be a more than suitable starting point.

▼ Excellent entry level shooting *and* a booby lady – this compilation really is value for money.

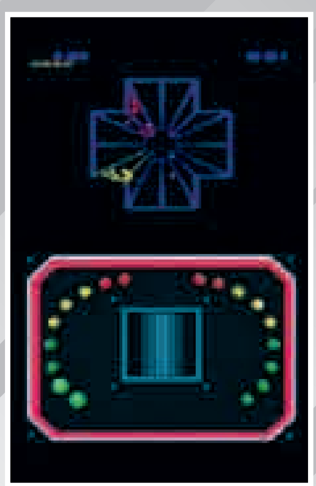
OVERALL SCORE 74%

Retro Atari Classics

Format: Nintendo DS
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Taniko
Release: Out Now
Price: £29.99
Games: *Pong, Missile Command, Tempest, Gravitar, Sprint, Warlords, Asteroids, Breakout, Centipede, Lunar Lander*

What do you get when you cross a selection of classic Atari games with an innovative console and a handful of famous graffiti artists? A shambling, gaudy mess of a compilation that proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that using the DS's stylus doesn't necessarily result in a fantastic play experience. That's what.

Kudos to Atari for being the first publisher to explore the retro genre on Nintendo's DS, but the way it's gone about it leaves a lot to be desired. For starters, none of the original titles are arcade versions; considering the power of the DS this is simply unforgiveable. The new 'tagged' variations (the originals with graffiti-style visuals) are even worse. Granted, this is a taste thing, but surely it would have made more sense to make them proper updates, as Namco has done with its PSP compilation? *Asteroids* looks fairly decent, but most are simply filled with garish colours and ungainly characters that lack any charm.



▲ *Tempest* has been rendered pretty much unplayable on the DS. For shame.

Still, many of these games hark back to an era when it was 'all about the gameplay', so it would be churlish to criticise *Retro Atari Classics* purely because of its aesthetics. So instead we'll slate it for ruining some of our favourite games of all time just so it could use the DS's touch screen.

Apart from *Breakout, Warlords, Tempest* and *Pong*, every single game plays better with the standard D-pad than it does with the DS's stylus. *Asteroids* is the stand-out and expects you to play the game by rotating your ship and tapping the screen to shoot and boost. It's a horrifically unwieldy experience and we can't see how this ever got past the development stage.

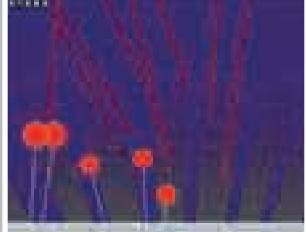
Then you have games like *Gravitar, Lunar Landing* and *Sprint*, which insist on you controlling the on-screen action by manipulating a virtual reproduction of an actual wheel or joystick. *Sprint* is simply too sensitive to be any real use, while *Lunar Landing* and *Gravitar* lack the tactile feedback that's so essential to play them.

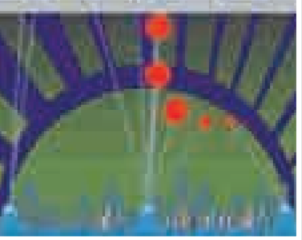
Of all the games on the compilation, *Tempest* and *Missile Command* were the ones we were really looking forward to playing, yet, sadly, even these classics have been ruined. All the skill that made *Missile Command* so engrossing in the arcades has now been dismissed, as you can simply tap the screen to launch missiles. While it's possible to use the D-pad, it's far too sensitive and lacks the precise control that made the arcade original so popular.

Tempest, on the other hand, has been utterly ruined; Taniko expects you to frantically rub a spinner left or right in order to navigate each level. It's woefully unresponsive and ruins one of the best games on the compilation. The fact it's impossible to play *Tempest* with the D-pad instead simply rubs salt deeper into the wound.

Of course, it's not all bad news, as many of the games are perfectly playable using the D-pad (even if they have no options and a horrid navigation system), but Atari could have been a bit more selective with the games it has chosen. *Pong* may have a rich videogame heritage, but it's crushingly dull nowadays and even the perfectly playable *Breakout* is inferior to titles like *Arkanoid*. Only *Warlords* genuinely held our attention for any amount of time

To be honest, we're not quite sure who *Retro Arcade Classics* is aimed at. The so-called original games are shockingly poor remakes of the arcade versions and will be shunned by retro fans, while the poorly implemented stylus controls will annoy even the most loyal DS gamers. In short, this is one of the worst compilations we've played for some time and should only be rented by those with latent masochistic tendencies.





▲ *Missile Command* as you've never seen it before. Unless you've already seen it, of course…

OVERALL SCORE 39%





FORGET ABOUT ZANGIEF, GUILE AND BLANKA – NOW FIGHT A NEW RIVAL

Format: Arcade, Dreamcast
Release: 1997
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House

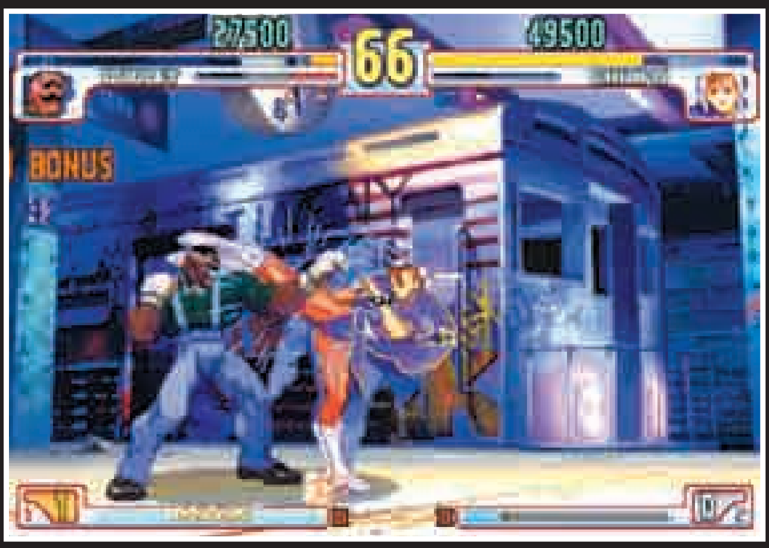
Ask any gamer – nay, anyone at all – to name the quintessential 2D beat-'em-up and we'll wager that the majority will plump for *Street Fighter II*. It's a fair call – without the impact of Capcom's seminal fighter, the genre would arguably be in quite a state today. Imagine a world where *Mortal Kombat* is considered the definitive fighting series and you've got some idea of what we're getting at. Horrible, huh? Exactly. But like *GoldenEye* is near unplayable by today's standards, *Street Fighter II* simply doesn't have the same allure and sheen that we still remember so vividly from some 15 years ago. There's just so much more potential for individuality and flair in more recent versions of the game. Allow us to digress.

From the front end, the home version of *3rd Strike* is clearly stripped down to the bare bones in terms of modes – while almost every other fighter was flaunting its Survival, Time Attack and Arrange modes, *3rd Strike* offered only Arcade and Versus play, with a pair of Training modes for working on the basics and parrying respectively. But that's all it needs. The quality and precision of the one-on-one action is virtually unrivalled to this day and while fighting the CPU can never faithfully recreate taking on a living, breathing opponent, *3rd Strike*'s AI is one of the closest things we've come across.

The real unsung hero of the game, though, is the System Direction option. It's a shame in some ways that the default settings are so easy to learn and work with but if there's anything you don't like about the game, chances are it can be altered or turned off entirely in these eight pages of in-depth options. In addition to the basic round time and life bar options, these extra variables let you set up parry timing, disable or enable various types of blocking or moves, and generally customise the game to your exact specifications. While fun and interesting to tweak, these often go untouched – after all, it's no use practising with Air Guard enabled then bottling it in competition play because your parrying isn't up to scratch.

Even the character roster seems somewhat refined. After the *Alpha* series sported 30-odd characters in its later outings, this high point of the *Street Fighter* series peaked at just 19 (a round 20 if you count mega-cheap final boss Gill). But this wasn't the real bone of contention. This came in the fact that while every other 2D *Street Fighter* had seen the appearance of many popular faces, Capcom saw fit to have just four familiar fighters return for *SFIII*. But as anyone who at least checked the move list before getting on their high horse could tell you, it was more a

▼ Parrying is one of the most rewarding elements in any game ever. Don't argue.



THE BALLAD OF DIRTY KEN

Despite its general quality, *3rd Strike* isn't without its problems. For the most part, these surround the returning characters – you only have to pop online in *Anniversary Collection* to see how many players refuse to look beyond the Shoto trio (Ryu, Ken and Akuma) and Chun-Li. Then again, you can't really blame them. Out of the four, dirty Ken and filthy Chun-Li are spectacularly poorly balanced. While most other characters balance power and speed wonderfully, these two miscreants have snaffled rather more than their fair share of each and the sickening superiority of many of their moves makes fighting against them rather a chore. One day, we hope people will realise how broken they are and challenge themselves to develop their Q or Necro skills instead of always visiting the House O' Cheap. We can dream, right?





▲ "One, two, the end!" said Dudley as he ruined Sean's face. Sean said nothing. He's a silly loser with no friends.



▲ Man in pants fights ugly freak – sounds a lot like WWE silliness to us…

cast post-makeover than an all-new set of warriors. Remy's Flash Kick, Sonic Boom and Double Sweep make him Charlie and Guile's successor, Necro's stretchy limbs and electricity suggest him to be the bastard love child of Dhalsim and Blanka, while everyone's favourite mask-wearing robot wannabe Q is an evolution of Balrog's charging antics. Only much, much cooler.

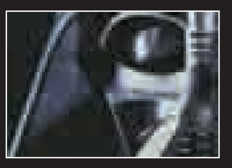
Even the choice of a single Super Art per battle isn't even close to the annoyance many nay-sayers make it out to be – quite the opposite, in fact. Every character and, indeed, player will be more vulnerable to a certain attack than another and it's up to you to work out which best suits your game based on your opponent (both pixelated and carbon-based forms) and your style of play.

But it's the wonderful parrying system that really sets *3rd Strike* apart. While SNK's 'Just Defend' system rewarded a late tap of away to guard (whether intentional or simply a little slow), Capcom flipped that 180° in one of the finest pieces of risk/reward gameplay ever. Players now had the choice to either guard against enemy attacks and, in the case of special and super moves, take a little chip damage per hit, or risk a parry (or 17) – only by tapping towards exactly as each hit of an attack connects can an entire string of blows be knocked away.

So why parry if it's so difficult? The rewards are three-fold. For one, a parried blow means your life bar goes untouched. Secondly, parrying the last (or only) hit of an attack gives you a fair window to launch one of your own and, finally, it's amazing to watch, commands much respect and will really make your opponent think about how they attack. For maximum kudos, there's the red parry to master: guard the first blow or two of a super (which are notoriously tricky to parry) and parry the last few hits for the same reward without quite the same risk. Oh, the options.

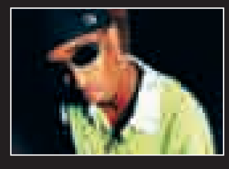
The chasm-like difference in quality between *Street Fighter II* and *3rd Strike* has been made that much more apparent by the relatively recent release of the *Anniversary Collection* for Xbox. With the two games side by side, it's amazing to see the evolution that has taken place – we'd never downplay the significance of *Street Fighter II* (and its quality in its day) but the time has come for people to realise that the days of its dominance have long since passed. *Street Fighter* is dead – long live *Street Fighter*.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1997



AT THE MOVIES

George Lucas decided to relieve himself all over many a childhood memory by 'polishing up' the *Star Wars* trilogy and releasing it in theatres across the world, complete with new bits that everyone hated. *Revenge Of The Sith* will be his last chance to redeem himself.



ON THE RADIO

Sean 'Puffy' Combs, aka Puff Daddy, took it upon himself to ruin The Police's *Every Breath You Take* and cash in on the death of Biggie Smalls this year. Still, at least he fell off his bike in the video. We still leave the first 30 seconds on just to enjoy his pain. Is that wrong?



TOP TOY

Since having a cat or dog is a lot of work, why not get a pet that runs on batteries? The Tamagotchi craze swept the nation this year and shops couldn't keep the little guys on the shelves for more than two minutes. Ours died in a mountain of its own mess in three days.



CARTOON HEROES

Oh mama! Brainless beefcake Johnny Bravo burst onto screens in '97 to a fond reception. Cartoon Network has since launched a slew of awesome new toons, although how it never snapped up the stunning *Invader Zim* is a mystery we demand solved. Any takers?



FASHION VICTIM

Got something to carry around that's slightly too big for your pockets? Then why not get yourself a mini rucksack! These silly little things were all the rage, you know – the more novelty the backpack, the more respect garnered from the streets. Big pockets are way underrated.

FALCOM'S MAG FANTASY ADVEN



ICAL
TURE

Retro Feature



▲ Mail and Slick share an intimate moment up in the trees. Nothing wrong with that.

YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF POPFUL MAIL? YOU'RE MISSING A TREAT. AND THIS IS WHY…

Story: John Szczepaniak

Importing videogames is seen by some as elitist and unnecessary, but sometimes it's the only way to acquire games of genuine quality. The slightly obscure *Popful Mail* series is a perfect example of why everyone should be encouraged to consider foreign games, since the series never made it to Europe.

The *Popful Mail* titles were created by the celebrated Japanese RPG developer Falcom – the same inspired minds that brought the world the *Ys* and *Faxanadu* games, meaning *Popful Mail* certainly has a good pedigree. While it may have at first seemed destined to remain in Japan forever it was eventually localised for the American Sega CD thanks to Working Designs, which is arguably the saviour of Western games players (it was also responsible for translating and bringing over the *Lunar* series of games as well as *Dragon Force*, *Magic Knight Rayearth* and many other Saturn classics).

There are six different *Popful Mail* games in existence (possibly more if you consider the US translation and alleged Korean IBM version), and they can be divided into three distinct categories: NEC, Nintendo and Sega. While each of the companies' systems was graced by unique and vastly different versions of the games, all contain the same basic principles and core elements that make them such a joy to play individually.

In gameplay terms all of them can be loosely described as being similar to Sega's *Wonderboy: The Dragon's Trap*, albeit greatly improved. There's a tremendous sense of satisfaction to be had from traversing the many platforms and slashing at enemies while solving various puzzles. Here Falcom must be commended since, as in most of its side-scrolling 2D games, the level design has been honed to perfection with everything feeling perfectly balanced.

While the need to switch between the three main characters (each with their own life bars, weapons, special traits and even bosses) allows for some well implemented obstacles and themed stages, it's a great example of just how well a 2D design ethos can work. Each game also had a sublimely cheerful soundtrack, as well as its own set of anime-styled cut-scenes that greatly enhanced the atmosphere, and often there are different scenes depending on which characters are talking to NPCs.

The story defied convention in that unlike other RPGs of the time, no-one actually needed saving. Instead it simply focused on the lead bounty hunter's quest for riches, which inadvertently leads to adventure. In the case of the American Sega CD version, it also stands as one of the funniest and most well-executed translations of the era.

All of this begs the question: why on earth were these games, bar one, never released outside Japan?

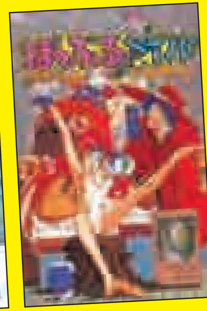
A LEGEND IS BORN

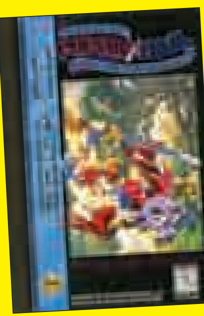
The first game in the series was released in 1991 for the Japanese NEC PC-88 (a high-end Japanese computer), and it was the basic foundation for all that would follow. A year later the game was updated and released for the NEC PC-98 (another computer) with enhanced graphics and totally revamped cut-scenes, although gameplay was identical.

The biggest difference between these and later games was that attacking enemies was automatic – the characters only needed to run into the side of an enemy to damage and eventually kill it, with the attack button remaining unused until projectile weapons were acquired. This greatly lowered the difficulty, since many bosses only needed repeated touching to be defeated.

Special note should be made about the visuals, since despite being very small there was a great deal of personality crammed into all the sprites (making great use of the limited palette). Falcom also painstakingly drew the left- and right-facing images accurately for both the main characters and enemies, meaning no-one would appear 'ambidextrous'. Interestingly, these early games bore more than a slight

THE MANY COVERS OF POPFUL MAIL OVER THE YEARS





ぽっぷるメイル

resemblance to Falcom's other series – *Dragon Slayer/Legacy Of The Wizard*. Overall these were some great games for the Japanese computers, coming in what are arguably the nicest floppy disc box sets around and being compelling enough for everyone to enjoy.

FAMICOM FAME

It would be another two years before any further games were released, with a distinctive non-sequential trio being spread over the NEC PC-Engine Super CD (Turbo-Duo), Nintendo Super Famicom and Sega Mega CD.

The PC-E CD version was basically just an enhanced port of the PC-98 game, with a larger colour palette, redone cut-scenes (again) and voice acting added for more important sections of dialogue; though bizarrely, it lost the left and right sprite images from the previous games. It also benefited from more accurate pad control and an improved automatic downward attack, which makes it very reminiscent of *Mario* games, since enemies could be killed simply by jumping on their heads.

Otherwise the battle system remained unchanged, making the NEC system version the most unusual to play with regards to control. Later on it also featured exclusive new levels designed for each character, essentially making it the best of the various NEC games.

The Super Famicom game, also released in 1994, marked the most dramatic transformation for the series. While all the main characters and stage themes remained the same, the actual style, narrative, puzzles and level designs had been changed completely, while a manual up and down attack was implemented.

It also brought about an innovative money system, since instead of collecting treasure bags from downed foes the enemy was marked down on a 'bounty hunting card'. The points scored on this could then be redeemed for gold at certain bounty shops, some of which also sold general items. This had little tangible effect on the gameplay, but did lend itself well to the bounty hunter storyline. Despite seeming like a total re-interpretation of the *Popful Mail* universe the core gameplay remained the same, making it a good alternative for those who have completed the other games, yet still demand more.

CD CHANGES

The Sega CD version, released in Japan in 1994 (and a year later in America) with another graphics overhaul and redone cut-scenes, is not only regarded as the pinnacle of the series but should also be of major interest to *Sonic* fans, since it very nearly became a *Sonic The Hedgehog* spin-off (no pun intended) tentatively labelled *Sister Sonic*. Apparently, while Sega was porting the game on behalf of Falcom, it toyed with the idea of transforming it into a *Sonic* title in order to boost sales of the then floundering Sega CD system. It was going to feature Sonic searching for his sister who had been lost at a toy fair, with all the *Popful Mail* characters replaced by Sega's more well-known mascots.

There is, of course, nothing new about this practice – the histories of the *Wonderboy* and *Mario* franchises are littered with equally strange character replacements. Yet while the idea of another *Sonic* game may seem appealing, the gameplay mechanics of *Popful Mail* are completely unsuited to the franchise; it probably wouldn't have worked and may have angered fans on both sides of the Atlantic. So it's just as well then that *Popful Mail* fans, upon discovering what Sega was planning to do, flooded the company with enough furious letters and petitions to force it to rethink. As such, the game was released unchanged.

Popful Mail on the Sega CD rightly deserves its critical acclaim earned abroad, since it's arguably the finest game to grace the system alongside *Snatcher*, *Sonic CD* and *Shining Force*. The machine's limited palette was expertly used to create some luscious visuals, while gameplay was smoother and more fluid than ever. The difficulty was also greatly increased – Sega had taken some of the basic level structure from the earlier NEC version and overlaid it with a vastly improved control and combat system. It also removed some of the backtracking from previous versions, such as the lengthy searching needed to free a character trapped in the caves.

While at first glance the Sega CD version may appear to be the same as the NEC versions, Sega really made it its own with gameplay

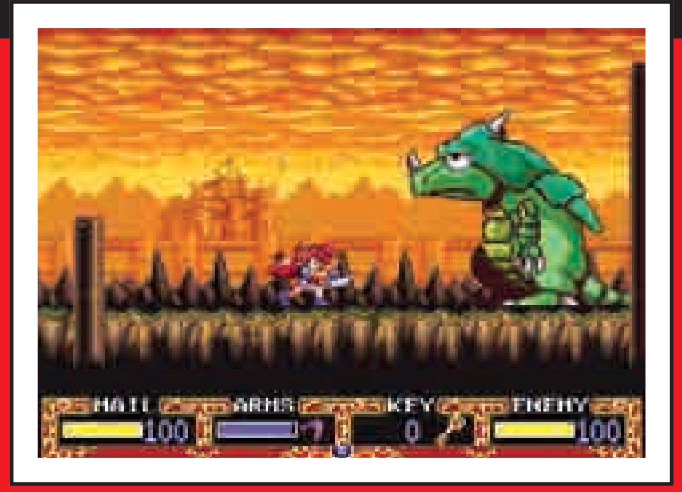
"BEG, BORROW OR 'ACQUIRE' A COPY – JUST MAKE SURE YOU PLAY A POPFUL MAIL GAME"

POPFUL GOODIES

Like all good anime-themed games, *Popful Mail* has its own range of merchandise. For the dedicated collector there is an ultra-rare Collected Manga Volume written by Yu Aizaki, around seven radio drama CDs (Japanese language only, sadly) with Megumi Hayashibara as Mail, and, of course, the standard abundance of strategy guides, music compilations, calendars, posters, trading cards, toys and so on. Unfortunately, as always, these were mainly released in Japan.



▲ Big eyes, big hair, big swords, small costumes… is it manga? We think it might be…



▲ The Sega CD was pushed to the limits with some stunning vistas, showing what CD-ROMs could do.

distinctive enough to warrant playing both versions. It also added improved and lengthy cut-scenes between each level that helped flesh out the story and it was a great example of what to do with the new CD medium.

Strangely, the character sprites were again mirrored and made 'ambidextrous', as opposed to the separately drawn left/right sides in the original PC-88/98 versions; this was unusual given the massive capacity of CD-ROMs, which could have easily held the extra images. While it may seem pedantic to dwell on such things, this does show a lack of extra effort being put into the game during development and hampers the player's sense of immersion. It's small touches in videogames that make them stay in the hearts of gamers over time, especially on such antiquated hardware. This is what gave the PC-88/98 games that extra bit of polish.

Then again, it's the extra effort and small touches put into the US localisation by Working Designs that help make the translated Sega CD game so special in the first place. According to Working Designs there are 39 individual speaking parts in the game (though some are simple one-liners) and it took roughly four months to record – twice as long as any other project it had done. Sometimes the team worked 12 to 16 hours a day on two different shifts, just for around 20 minutes of cut-scenes and two and a half hours of in-game dialogue. The team admit to being perfectionists, with some lines supposedly requiring anywhere between 20 and 50 takes before they were happy with it. This level of dedication really shines through, with the voice acting being incredibly good and at times absolutely hilarious – another high point for the game.

While the Japanese script could charitably be described as 'dull', Working Designs went to great lengths during translation to inject it with humour, resulting in a script that is genuinely funny and works perfectly with the light-hearted style of the game. There are plenty of well-executed jokes, ranging from several Schwarzenegger film references to hilarious 'cake and pie' gags for one character. While some fans have complained about Working Designs' methods, accusing it of not staying true to the source material, the sterling work it did on *Popful Mail* shows a real love for the game and benefited it far more than a simple straight translation ever would have.

HOW TO PLAY

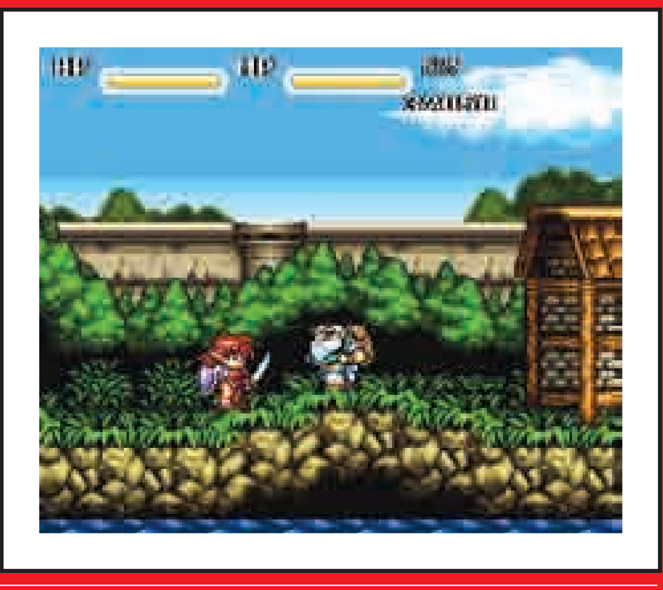
As has been said, the only way to legally play these phenomenal games is through importing. While the PC-88/98 games can be emulated (the PC-98 game is best, looking better and being far easier to set up) the classier version is the Turbo-Duo game, which runs without the need for an expensive arcade card on any region of system.

The Super Famicom game will need either a native system or import adapter. But be warned: there are a few sticking points. To pass the cave section, for instance, head back to the first town and find the mini-game-playing old man. For the Sega CD it's trickier, since though there is a CDX adapter cartridge, it only works on earlier models of system. Luckily, the game can easily be patched using ConvSCD (www.retrodev.com), which is well worth investigating for all your Sega CD importing needs. Failing that, the CD games can be run via an emulator.

When you look at it, this is one series that has been criminally overlooked (as have most Falcom games, for that matter), and really should have been granted a UK release. Whether you must beg, borrow or 'acquire' a copy, be sure to play one by any means necessary, especially the superb Sega version.

As for the future? There is hope, since Falcom has recently given Japanese gamers another handheld game worth caring about by announcing a port of the earlier iterations to mobile phones. Though, as expected, they won't be leaving Japan any time soon. What we really need is a PS2 or even PSP port, which could be quite likely since Working Designs still owns the rights to its translated text and dialogue (find out more in our interview over the page), though it would need to re-licence the game itself. Maybe some written requests might be the order of the day…

SPECIAL THANKS TO BRADY HARTEL FOR SUPPLYING MANY RESOURCES.

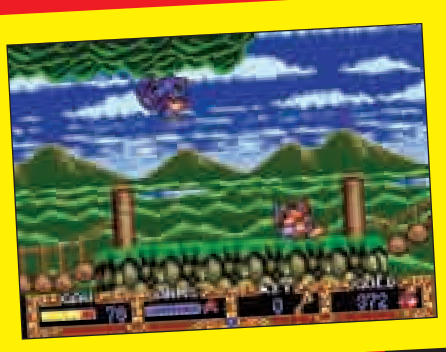


▲ You'll need to have a chat with this old man in order to pass the cave section in the Super Famicom version.









WORKING PROGRESS

Hopefully by now, you'll agree that Popful Mail is one of the greatest games never to make it to the UK. We managed to find the man responsible for at least getting it as far as the US...

We're huge fans of Working Designs. After all, the American developer has been responsible for porting and translating some fantastic import titles that may have remained in Japan forever. *Thunder Force V*, *Alundra*, *Dragon Force*, *Sega Ages* and, of course, *Popful Mail* are just a few of the games it has worked on over the years and it's still producing titles for the PS2. We took time out to have a chinwag with Victor Ireland, head of Working Designs, to discover a little more about the superb *Popful Mail* series.

gTM: WERE YOU EVER APPROACHED ABOUT LOCALISING THE SUPER FAMICOM OR TURBO DUO VERSIONS OF POPFUL MAIL THAT WERE RELEASED IN JAPAN?

VICTOR IRELAND: The Turbo one was contemplated, but the Duo was such a mess in the US, and it was actually slightly inferior to the Mega CD version, so, fortunately, the US ended up getting the best version anyway.

gTM: CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THIS *SISTER SONIC* RUMOUR REGARDING THE US RELEASE? IS IT TRUE SEGA WANTED TO REMAKE THE GAME AS A *SONIC* SPIN-OFF?

VI: I believe it is true because that's what I was told by the head of the Consumersoft division at Sega of Japan. We were working on *Vay* at the time, and the company that was doing that title was part-owned by him. He was in the building and we got along quite well, so he decided to show me some games in progress. *Popful Mail* had just been rejected as *Sister Sonic* at that point, according to him, and he offered it to us. Luckily, that deal then led directly to both *Dragon Force* and *Iron Storm*.

gTM: WAS THERE EVER ANY TALK OF SEGA (OR ANYONE ELSE) USING YOUR LOCALISED VERSION FOR RELEASE IN THE UK?

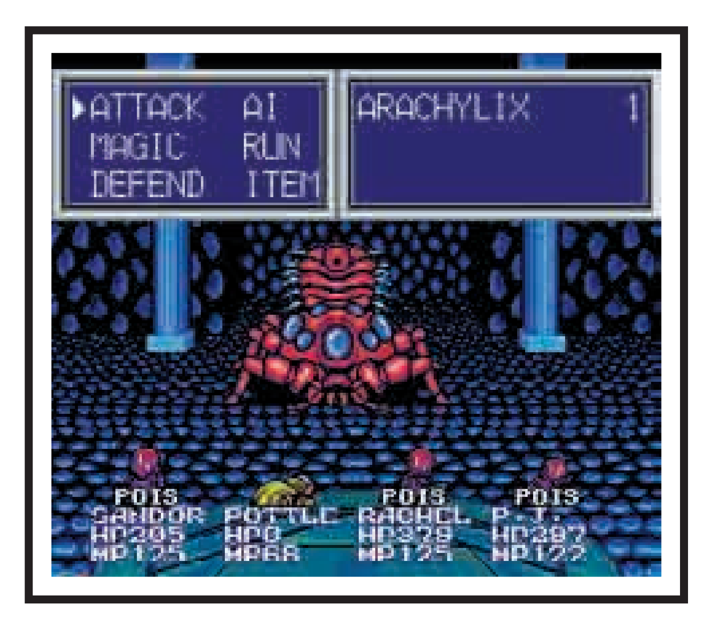
VI: Yes, absolutely. It was discussed on and off for some time. Sadly, the only game we did of Sega's that actually made it was *Dragon Force*, and that was thanks mostly to the stellar efforts of an awesome guy by the name of Mark Maslowicz who worked for Sega Europe.

gTM: IS IT TRUE THAT DURING THE LOCALISATION OF POPFUL MAIL YOU UPPED THE DIFFICULTY OF THE JAPANESE GAME?

VI: That's correct. The Japanese one was far too easy and there was no real challenge or strategy to any of the bosses that you faced. In Japan you buy a game and you own it. In the US (especially at the time) return policies were extremely liberal. To leave the game as-was would be to guarantee that a substantial portion of the games would be 'extended rentals' at our expense.

gTM: HAVE YOU HAD MUCH FEEDBACK REGARDING YOUR TRANSLATION AND DUBBING OF THE GAME?

VI: Actually, it's one we get the most compliments on, and one of my personal favourites. The tone of the game demanded a Working Designs-style localisation, and we went all-out to make it as good as possible.





▲ *Dragon Force* was the only translation Working Designs did for Sega to make it the UK. Maybe if we all wish hard enough we can get a few more of these beauties in our hands.

"I'D LOVE TO RE-RELEASE POPFUL MAIL, AND RECOGNITION FOR IT IS THERE AMONG THE HARDCORE, BUT IT WOULD BE A LOT OF WORK"

gTM: HOW ACCURATE IS THE TRANSLATION WITH REGARDS TO CHARACTER NAMES AND STORYLINE? WE NOTICED THAT THE SUPER FAMICOM VERSION HAS DIFFERENT NAMES FOR MOST CHARACTERS, FOR EXAMPLE.

VI: They were pretty accurate for the main characters, as I remember. I do know that we changed the name of Blackey to Slick. Blackey didn't fit the character look at all, and Slick tied in with the way he was always trying to be a smooth operator, yet getting into enormous trouble. Mail, Tatto and Gaw were the same (though Gaw may have been Gau) but the minor characters were definitely changed. There was no Clabberdeen Clotchsnyffer Leetzelwiffle Poopiewouffen von Venuncio Kraken Lichter Rachetface XIV, Feudal Lord of Odorburg in the original, for instance.

gTM: HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED AND HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO TRANSLATE?

VI: It was a huge project at the time. I tried dual directors, but that was a trial in itself. In total there were probably around 20 actors, two directors and the sound engineer. I also took care of all the writing duties.

gTM: HOW WELL DID IT SELL?

VI: Horribly. Shortly before *Popful Mail* was released, Sega of America was kind enough to announce the discontinuation of the Sega CD straight to the press. We found out about it there and then. Retailers were loath to stock Sega CD titles at any depth after that announcement. We sold far less than 20,000 copies, a fraction of what we normally sold for an RPG title. Of course, the upside was that once word got out about how great it was years later, the price has stayed quite steady on eBay. It really is the best of all the *Popful Mail* versions and one of the best games on the Sega CD.

gTM: DOES WORKING DESIGNS HAVE THE RIGHTS TO RE-RELEASE POPFUL MAIL ON A MODERN PLATFORM? IF SO, ARE YOU PLANNING TO DO SO?

VI: We own the rights to our voice and text for the US version, but we'd have to re-licence to do it elsewhere. I'd love to do it, and I think the recognition for the title is there now among the hardcore, but it would be a substantial amount of work.

gTM: ARE THERE ANY INTERESTING STORIES YOU HAVE REGARDING THE POPFUL MAIL UNIVERSE IN GENERAL? ANY RUMOURS YOU WANT TO CLARIFY, HIDDEN TRUTHS YOU WANT TO REVEAL, SOME EXCITING FACT THAT HASN'T BEEN DISCLOSED YET?

VI: Some people don't know that we re-scored the opening animation and provided all-new music for the title screen. The initial opening animation score was a disaster and it took a couple of tries to get it right. The Nuts Cracker "I think-a knocked something loose a in a my head… boomba, I think-a I'm dead" line was sampled for a song one of the employees in the studio was working on. There were so many great lines in that game and some still crack me up today.

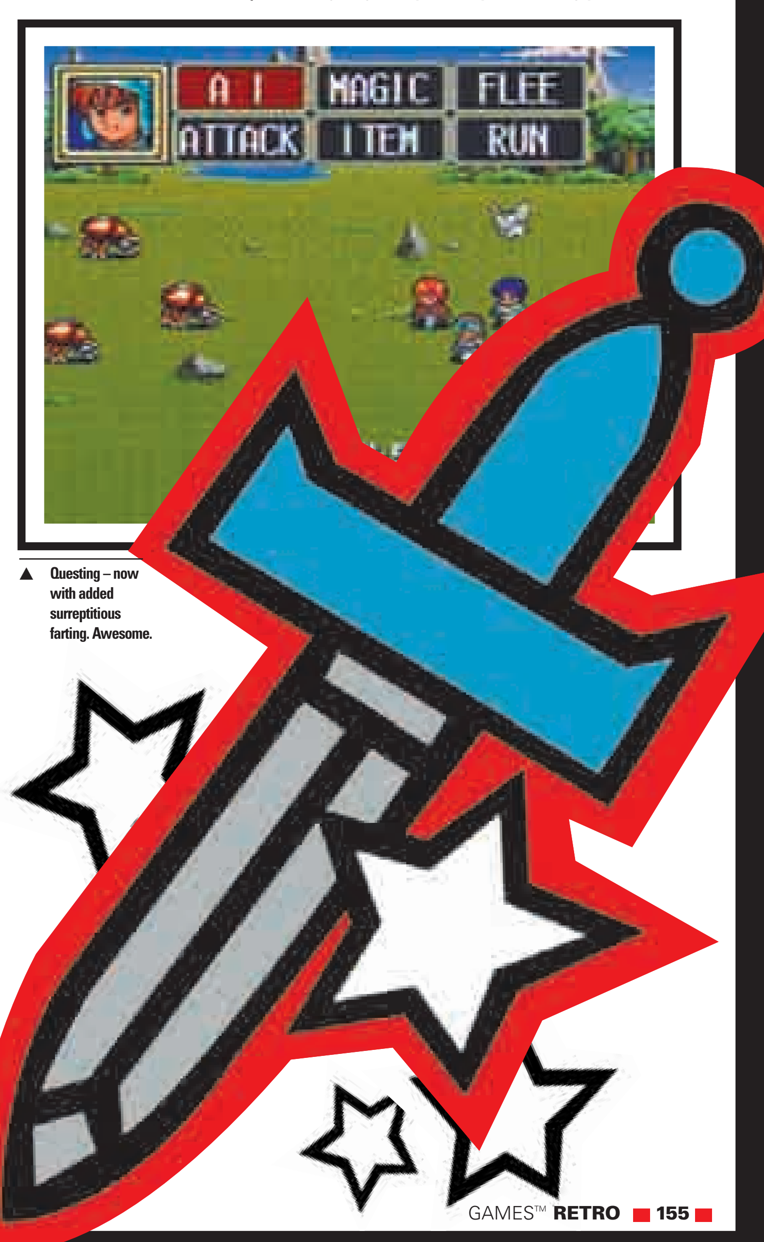
Oh, and the guy who voiced Slick was Ashley Angel. He did *Lunar* later, and then moved on to the boy band O-Town in the US. I believe he's releasing a solo album later this year.

Then you have the scene where you first meet Mumbles (played by John Truitt, pre-*Ghaleon*) – we slipped a fart into the mix when he turns. It's juvenile, yes, but it's an ongoing challenge to bury as many farts in games as we (the recording engineer and I) can, yet keep them unnoticed unless you know where to listen.

Finally, the Sega/Falcom partnership that produced *Popful Mail* was 'supposed' to generate a number of additional titles, but imploded shortly after *Popful Mail* was released for reasons I was never told. It's a real shame, because if Mega CD *Popful Mail* is any measure, the partnership could have achieved great things.



▲ *Thunder Force V* was another triumph for Working Designs. Can you see why we love these guys?



▲ Questing – now with added surreptitious farting. Awesome.



Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

MSX APPEAL

Dear games™

I have been an avid computer and console gamer since the ZX81. I progressed to the ZX Spectrum and then to the Japanese MSX system, and I was wondering why this machine is not yet included in your list of retro gaming machines. I feel the MSX computer system owned by many of my friends at the time was superior to the competition, having smooth graphics, fast cartridge games, an easy-to-use programming editor and a list of titles from the local arcade supported by Konami.

One point worth noting is that *Metal Gear* was first published on the MSX range of computers and still incorporates many of the original elements on the current PS2 versions.

Rob Dunning

You're not the first person to ask about the excellent MSX and we'll definitely be covering it in a future issue of the mag. Now if only we could get someone to lend us their machine and a few games for a photo shoot…

NOT SO MEGA MAN

Dear games™

I have a bone to pick with you. Back in issue 23 when you reviewed the *Mega Man Anniversary Collection*, you said you'd be covering the original Game Boy *Mega Man* games in a future issue, I was just wondering which issue it would be, because so far I've scrolled through every issue since then and haven't seen a single story or feature about it – what's going on?

I have played through a few *Mega Man* titles for the brick-sized Game Boy and used to own *Mega Man 4*, as well as *Mega Man*, but that was many years ago. They were my favourite games for months and I was constantly replaying them.



Sit tight for GBA *Mega Man* action. It's on its way. Soon. Ish.

I'd also like to know when the *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* for the GameCube is coming out in the UK, as I can't seem to get it anywhere. Ever since I first heard about this highly rated compilation I've been excited beyond belief, but now I'm starting to get very annoyed.

Marc Hull

We're sorry, Marc, but the late review is out of our hands. The Game Boy Advance *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* has kept slipping and now isn't due until the beginning of July. Rest assured, as soon as it appears we'll definitely be covering it. As for your query about the GameCube version, we've got some bad news for you – it's highly unlikely that it will reach the UK. Fortunately, the US version is compatible with Freeloader and can be bought from the likes of www.videogamesplus.ca for a very good price.

VIC 20 VICTORY

Dear games™

I know you're going to shoot me down in flames for suggesting this, but I've been following your esteemed magazine since issue one and you've paid scant regard to one of the best ever home computers ever – the Commodore Vic 20, or 'the friendly computer' as it was known about 25 years ago.

I've been a massive fan of the Vic 20 ever since it was first produced and marketed. I'm sure you're aware of its specifications, but are you aware of how expensive some of its games are? Forget *Radiant Silvergun*, where a copy maybe fetches £100-200. I've seen a sought-after copy of *Ultima: Escape From Mount Draxx* go for over £1,500 on eBay.

The Vic 20 is also home to an amazing number of quality arcade conversions such as *Galaxian*, *Dig Dug* and *Donkey Kong*. The conversion of *Pac-Man* (called *Jelly Monsters*) was so good that Namco (or maybe it was Atari – I can't remember now) actually decided to have it banned. Needless to say, copies of *Jelly Monsters* now trade for reasonably high prices on eBay.

Anyway, I'd like to see a bit of coverage of the Vic 20, and not just articles about the Commodore64 and Spectrum. The Vic 20 was one of the first ever mass-market colour home computers and deserves its place in videogame history. Go on, you know it makes sense!

Vince Bertonesi

You must be wearing your lucky socks today because the Vic 20 will be the first computer we'll be looking at when we relaunch our 'Classic Machine' feature. Hopefully, it should be appearing in issue 32 but, as we're so fond of saying, watch this space.



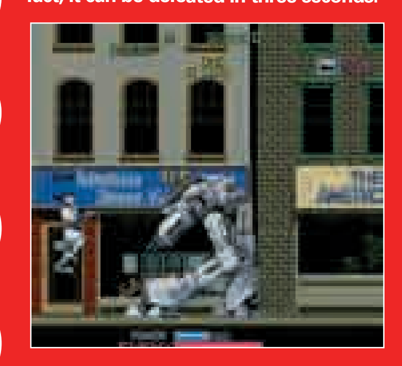






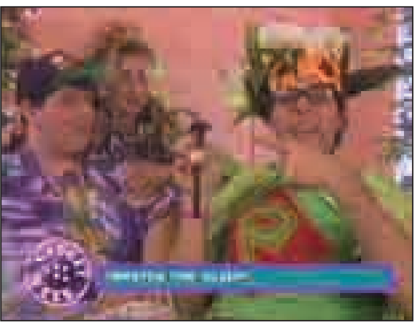
STAR LETTER

Dear games™
I was reading the Great Bosses article in issue 29 about ED-209 from *Robocop* and you said it takes you longer than 20 seconds (with some weird jumping and counter-attack tactics) to defeat it. In fact, it can be defeated in three seconds.



I remember watching my brother playing this game in the arcade many years ago and he taught me a way of defeating ED-209 before it even walks onto the screen. Basically, when you get to the end of the level, walk right to the end of the screen (before ED-209 appears) and press fire and jump together and rapidly. This will kill him in three seconds before he can step onto the screen. Just a tip I thought you would want to know.
Phun Lam

Okay, so we're flawed geniuses, alright? If we were awesome at games all the time we'd just make everyone else feel bad. Have yourself a retro T-shirt as a reward for bringing us back down to Earth.


Hey, we've all got to start somewhere. Even if it's *Games World*.

Great to hear you're enjoying the old machines as well as the new ones. The Mega Drive in particular had a fantastic range of games available and, as you're probably aware, they can be picked up relatively cheaply. When you're ready to step up a notch why not check out the PC Engine and Sega's Saturn?

NEVER TOO YOUNG

Dear games™
Is it just me or do people think that to be a hardcore retro gamer you had to be alive when the machine actually came out? I get so many funny looks when I go in to a shop and ask for NES games, as I'm 14, female and obviously look like I don't know what I'm talking about – but I do, I really do.

In 1996 at the tender and influential age of five some distant relatives bought me a second-hand Mega Drive. From the moment I plugged it into my TV I was immediately hooked. Since then I've asked for every console that has come out, although I've not always received them due to lack of money.

Now, though, I have my own cash and am investing it in the consoles that made the gaming world. It's not that I don't like new consoles (I eagerly await the UK launch of the DS and own a PlayStation2) but it's just not the same as playing an old, musty 8- or 16-bit machine, especially when it has been around longer than you.

Just remember, you don't have to be from the Seventies and Eighties to be a hardcore retro gamer.
Kym Primrose

ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT THAT ONE?

Dear games™
With regard to the letter 'Yeah but no' in issue 29, I thought I'd enlighten you with another game-related David Walliams fact. He was a regular on the TV show *Games World* on Sky One around 1993. After a little search on the good old internet I found this – www.davidwalliamsfans.com/Gamesworld.htm. Check it out for downloads from the series.
Jonathan Morris

Thanks for the link, but we're well aware of Mr Walliams' *Games World* exploits; our very own deputy editor used to be a Videator on the show for three seasons and has told us plenty of stories. If only we could share them with you…



Retro Contact is sponsored by Joystick Junkies. Each month's Star Letter will win its author an item of retro gaming clothing of their choice worth up to £20.









It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60



ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£15-40

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (depending on model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£50-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£60-90
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£80-180
Super Grafx	£200-300





NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-150 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-40
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20-30
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£20-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

Right then, you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classic games to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to buy. Hopefully, we can help.

Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of top games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change, so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less (or, unfortunately, more). This month we're taking a look at some of the best platform games available for the PAL Mega Drive.

Dynamite Headdy

Estimated Price: £5-10
Developer: Treasure

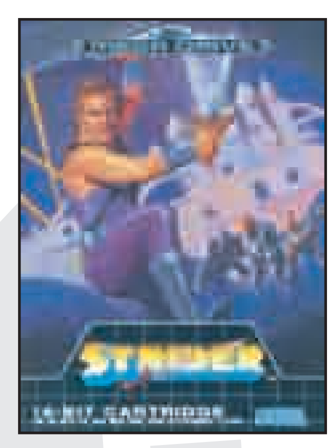
For just a few quid you can get hold of one of the finest looking Mega Drive titles around (Treasure certainly knew how to push that 16-bit architecture) and a damn fine platformer to boot. Just make sure you don't pay a fortune for the Treasure name, as it's going for a song on eBay.



Strider

Estimated Price: £1-5
Developer: Capcom

While it's not the most accurate conversion of Capcom's hit coin-op, *Strider* remains one of the greatest Mega Drive ports. It's still an absolute joy to play, and while everything may have a little more flicker then we remember, the all-important gameplay remains intact.



Kid Chameleon

Estimated Price £3-10
Developer: Sega

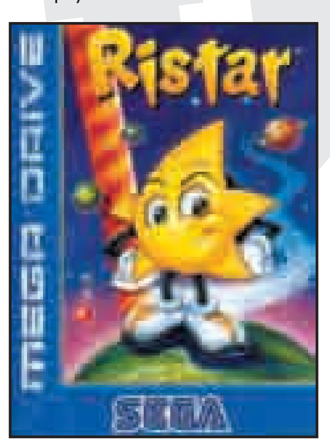
There are plenty of bargains for the Mega Drive and the quirky *Kid Chameleon* is another to keep an eye out for. It's showing its age now – the tiny sprites and generic backgrounds let it down – but the platforming is as good as ever. The different masks will still raise a smile and so will the price.



Ristar

Estimated Price: £5-25
Developer: Sega

Be careful with *Ristar*, as its price can fluctuate wildly – some importers expect you to pay up to £50. If you can get it for a decent price, you'll find *Ristar* a thoroughly enjoyable platformer that adds plenty of new ideas to the standard formula. Just don't pay too much.



The Revenge Of Shinobi

Estimated Price £1-5
Developer: Sonic Team

The Revenge Of Shinobi is still one of the best Mega Drive platformers – and, indeed, *Shinobi* games. Level design is fantastic and some bosses still stand out. The clunky control system takes a while to get used to (selecting magic is a pain) but its greatness is plain to see.



Sonic The Hedgehog 2

Estimated Price: 50p-£4
Developer: Sonic Team

Enhanced visuals, tweaked gameplay and the addition of Miles 'Tails' Prower all combined to make Sonic's second outing great fun. As it was given away free with the Mega Drive, *Sonic 2* is now ridiculously easy to pick up – nab yourself a copy.



Mega Man: The Wily Wars

Estimated Price: £30-70
Developer: Capcom

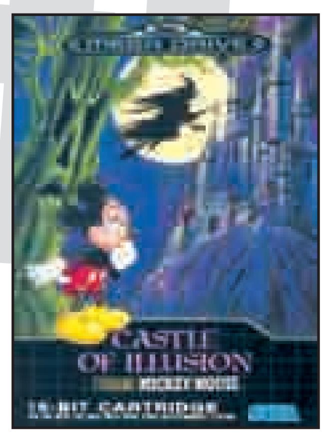
Yes, it's a high price, but Mega Man's only Mega Drive adventure is superb and features challenging gameplay, superb visuals and some great bosses. The price tag is because this was released in limited quantities and thus became very hard to find.



Mickey Mouse: Castle Of Illusion

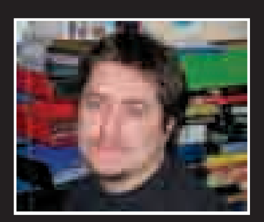
Estimated Price: 50p-£3.50
Developer: Sega

Sega made some cracking Disney titles for the Mega Drive, but *Castle Of Illusion* is our favourite. It looked sumptuous and still makes the grade today. Yes, it's easy and some bosses are walkovers, but considering the price, you'd be silly to miss it.



THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION


'Amiga's Spanish for 'girlfriend', you know. If this were Spain, our collector would have four girlfriends. Lucky devil.



LIKE MANY OF THE COLLECTIONS WE FEATURE, THERE SIMPLY ISN'T ENOUGH ROOM ON THE PAGE TO SHOW YOU JOBY SPRAGG'S ENTIRE HAUL. TRUST US, THOUGH, WHEN WE SAY THAT THE 28-YEAR-OLD ADMINISTRATION TEAM MANAGER'S HORDE IS VERY IMPRESSIVE INDEED…

Q) How long have you been collecting?

I've been collecting retro games and consoles for around two years, but in that time I've already amassed a fair few machines and games.

Q) How much is your collection worth?

This is a fairly difficult one to answer as most people often over-value what they have. If I had to take a wild stab, though, I'd say my collection is probably worth over £4,000.

Q) How did your interest in collecting come about?

It's probably hard to believe, but I actually started collecting when I picked up a copy of *Midway Arcade Treasures* for the Xbox and started playing *Paperboy*. I remembered how enjoyable my childhood was playing games like *Paperboy* and *Karnov* on the Spectrum, and started checking out eBay to see how much it would cost to pick up the consoles of the past. When I realised it wouldn't actually cost that much, I quickly started amassing my collection.

Q) What's your most prized possession?

I would love to say a sealed, mint copy of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for the Sega Saturn, but I'd be lying. It's actually a brand new Sega Mega CD 2, boxed and in mint condition with all manuals, screws, inserts – the lot. The box has slight sun damage as it was put in the window of a shop in an attempt to sell, but I rescued it for the princely sum of £40.

Q) What's the most highly desirable item that you haven't tracked down yet?

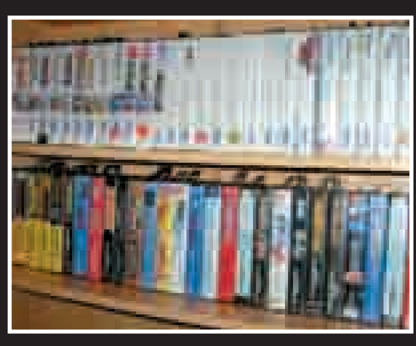
There are a couple of things that I would love to get hold of – *Paper Mario*, *Suikoden 1* & *2*, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* and *Samba De Amigo*. I'll keep looking, though…

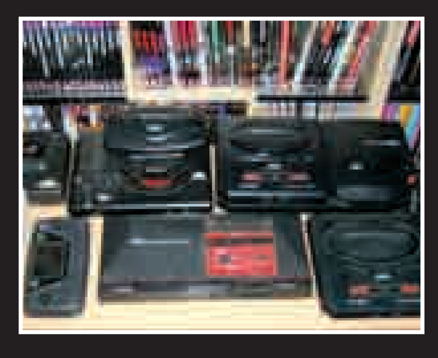
Q) What's the most money you've ever spent on a single item?

I haven't had the opportunity to spend large amounts on things, but I was desperate to get hold of a Phillips CD-I a few months ago, so I paid £70 for that. It did have its digital video cartridge installed and about 15 games, so I didn't really mind the expenditure.

Q) What sources do you use and have you ever found a real bargain?

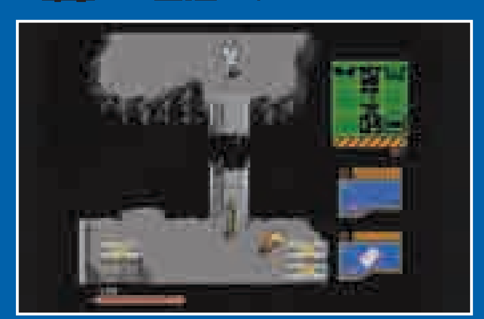
I mostly use the Gamestations in Manchester and Bolton to build up my collection, as they tend to get large amounts of good games and consoles on a regular basis. There's also Cash Generator, eBay and a lovely branch of shops called CEX that I regularly use. As for bargains, I've managed to pick up many of my PSone games for as little as 20 pence each!


Behold the many ages of Sega. Or even the many Sega Ages, as the promotional material has it.



Q) What does your significant other think of your collecting?

My wife doesn't seem to be that bothered, as she was the one who decorated and organised the room, turning it into a games room! She loves playing games like *Suikoden* and *Fable*, and has an itching to keep playing *Zoo Keeper* on my DS. We're perfectly suited in that way.


Broken bridges and men in white coats – all this and more next month.

NEXT MONTH IN RETRO

In a few weeks' time we'll be revisiting a classic machine, taking a look back at some of LucasArts' greatest adventures and reviewing Sega Classics Collection for the PlayStation2.

See you then!

ON SALE 19 MAY


eMag

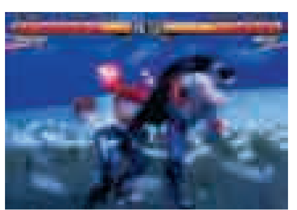
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



TEKKEN 5

Woo, and indeed, hoo – Namco has done the unthinkable and actually listened to the criticism levelled at the last *Tekken* game. The results speak for themselves, especially since even the most anti-*Tekken* people in the office soon couldn't resist its lure.



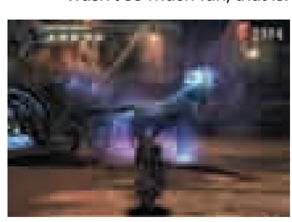
NINA WILLIAMS: DEATH BY DEGREES

This, on the other hand, is the kind of product that we're hoping Namco soon forgets about, never allowing it to darken our door again. Truly, there's no justice in the world if this game manages to even scrape into the top 40.



DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING

Capcom must not like the people who play its games very much – why else would the bosses in Dante's third adventure be so incredibly tough? It's almost enough to make us weep… if it wasn't so much fun, that is.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

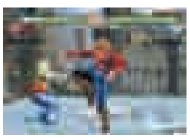
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

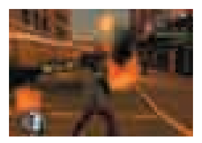
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	EA takes the arcade racing genre to new heights
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	As tough as nuts, but certainly the highlight of the series
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	One of the quirkiest action puzzle games around
NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports Big	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	In-House	The Prince returns, darker than ever before
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period.
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
Silent Hill 2	Konami	In-House	The high point of Konami's survival horror series
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk's* of the snowboarding world
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution
Possibly the greatest fighting game ever created, according to some of the more hardcore players we know.



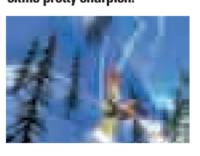
GTA: San Andreas
Several months on and some of us still haven't managed to even scratch the surface of Rockstar's epic.



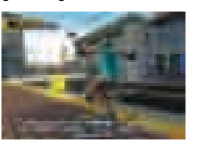
Hitman: Contracts
Now that *Blood Money* has slipped back towards the end of 2005, there's no excuse not to finish Agent 47's last outing.



SSX 3
According to EA, *SSX 4* is already on the way – so we'd better get perfecting our slope skills pretty sharpish.



Tony Hawks Underground 2
A step back in the right direction for the *Tony Hawk* series, which can only mean good things for the future.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE



XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

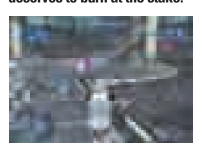
Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. The 'special edition' Crystal console is now widely available from stores across the country.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	The game that redefines the arcade racing genre
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of *GTA III* and *Vice City*, without a doubt
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie	The Xbox's most popular game just got even better
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for *Oddworld* that really works
Out Run 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	As comprehensive an online racer as you're ever likely to find
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Rallisport Challenge 2	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	Does everything you'd want from a rally game and more
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	In-House	Even better than the original, with a storming Live mode
Star Wars Battlefront	Activision	Pandemic Studios	A great game first, a great *Star Wars* game second
Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	Ion Storm	*Splinter Cell* for the Middle Ages? Sounds good to us…

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

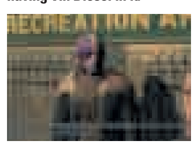
Star Wars: Battlefront
Any twenty-something man who tells us that playing as a Stormtrooper isn't fun deserves to burn at the stake.



Rallisport Challenge 2
Still unmatched as far as console rally games go, with all the refinements and style that *Colin McRae* missed.



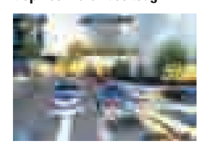
Chronicles Of Riddick
Surprisingly fun, but slightly too short, adventure FPS that doesn't suffer from having Vin Diesel in it.



Jet Set Radio Future
Strange that one of the Xbox launch titles still manages to rank up there as one of the very best.



Burnout 3: Takedown
99 per cent in, and we're still not done with Criterion's racer. If only the last few trophies weren't so tough.







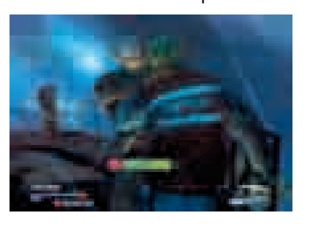
METAL WOLF CHAOS
Coming from the developer behind the *Armored Core* series, you'd have thought *Metal Wolf Chaos* might have been slightly more tactical than the frantic blast-'em-up it is. Still, that doesn't stop it from being fun, if rather shallow, entertainment.



BROTHERS IN ARMS
Sadly not quite the WWII epic that we were led to believe, but the fact that it also isn't the FPS that everyone expected thanks to the more strategic elements at least left us with a smile on our faces. Whether the general public feel the same is another matter.



COLD FEAR
Mmm, pretty. But then pretty graphics don't make a game great – a fact that *Cold Fear* illustrates all too quickly. Yes, so the exterior effects are gorgeous but when the gameplay can't live up to the expectations they create, it soon turns into a lifeless lump.



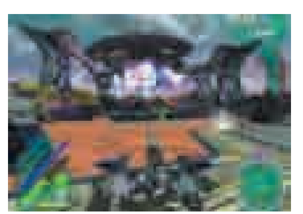
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



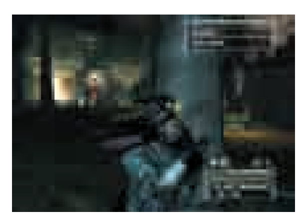
STAR FOX: ASSAULT

Good lord, no – what on earth happened to Fox? Where did all the enjoyable flying sections go? How come he spends half his time running around with a gun? And why doesn't he look half as good as he did in *Star Fox Adventures*? What a waste.



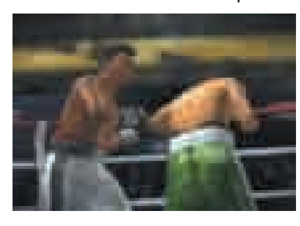
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

The third in a series is always the hardest – you don't want to alienate the fans, but you need to do something new to avoid being stale. *Chaos Theory* walks the tightrope and succeeds… but only thanks to the Co-Op mode.



FIGHT NIGHT: ROUND 2

Thanks to the GameCube pad's design, the sequel to *Fight Night* isn't the easiest game to play – damn those pointed edges on the analogue stick moulding. Still, the mere opportunity to play *Super Punch-Out* on our GameCubes more than makes up for it.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

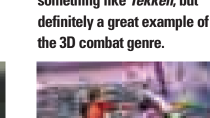
TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Alien Hominid IMPORT	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	Hardcore 2D blasting with a sense of humour
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine Mario adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
Wario Ware: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Zelda: Four Swords Adventures	Nintendo	In-House	The perfect excuse to have your friends round all the time
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube

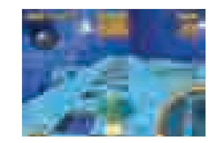
WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Resident Evil 4
You have to buy this game. Really, you do. If you don't, then you're clearly some kind of strange person. Honest.

Soul Calibur II
Not nearly as deep as something like *Tekken*, but definitely a great example of the 3D combat genre.



Super Monkey Ball 2
Prettier, shinier and more fun than most other action puzzlers we can think of – how can you resist a monkey in a ball?



Alien Hominid
From a simple Flash game to one of the strangest and most entertaining shoot-'em-ups we've played for ages.



Metroid Prime 2
Not a huge step forwards from the last one, but still manages to be just as much fun in every single way.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



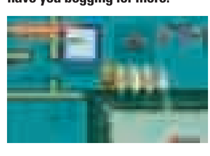
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor IMPORT	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

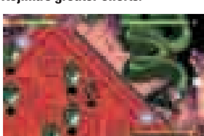
Legend Of Zelda: Minish Cap
Certainly the best handheld attempt at the *Zelda* series we've seen, with quality that'll have you begging for more.



Mario Golf: Advance Tour
Not your typical golf game – Camelot's influence has helped carve a fine game from a sport that's not all that exciting.



Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand
Not exactly easy to play in the cloud-infested land that is the UK, but still stands out as one of Hideo Kojima's greater efforts.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



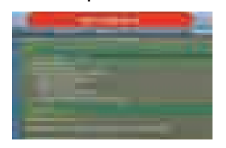
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCSoft	Cryptic Studios
Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	EA	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

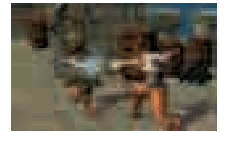
Football Manager 2005
Still the reigning champion of the soccer simulation league. With the competition fading fast, it could be there for quite some time.



Rise Of Nations
Splendid RTS action spanning the ages, with enough replay value to keep you coming back time and time again.



Sid Meier's Pirates!
Yo ho, yo ho, a pirate's life on the PC. Once you've spliced that mainbrace, you really won't want to set sail anywhere else.



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

There's more to the next issue of **games™** than just Xbox 2 games, you know… although, obviously, they're quite important. We'll also be going hands-on with *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat*, checking out Atari's new line-up and generally going ga-ga right before E3.

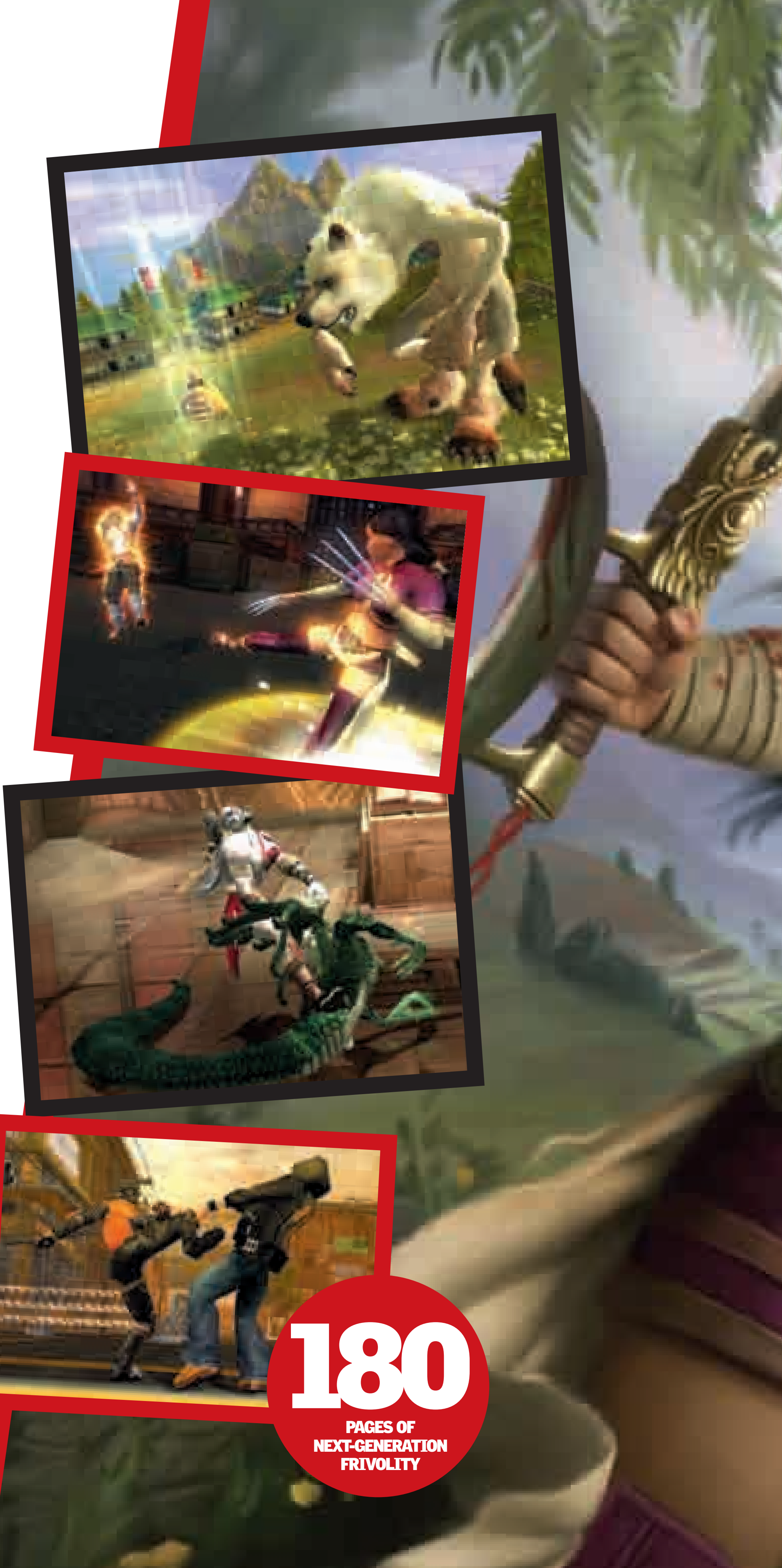
MORE… REVIEWS

So, an apology – we're sorry that games like *Forza Motorsport* and *Rainbow Six: Lockdown* weren't in this issue. However, both Ubisoft and Microsoft have assured us they'll be ready to be reviewed next month, along with the likes of *Jade Empire*, *God Of War*, *Area 51*, *Dynasty Warriors 5*, *Monster Hunter* and more PSP titles than you can shake a Memory Stick Duo at.

MORE… FEATURES

Now, here's a problem. Normally, we like nothing more than to tell you which developers we're visiting, who'll be talking to us about their upcoming games, or what exciting topics we'll be delving into. This month, though, we can't. Sworn to secrecy and all that, in a WWII 'loose lips sink ships' kind of way. Yes, we know it's a bind but believe us, you'll be incredibly excited when you find out what it is. Plus, Konami's Hideo Kojima and Capcom's Hiroyuki Kobayashi grant us their time for yet more in-depth interview shenanigans.

Please note: Due to circumstances beyond our control, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it. Probably words. And some pictures.




NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
It's a case of out with the old, in with the new, as games™ exclusively previews the first batch of Xbox 2 games
ON SALE 19 MAY 05
LAUNCH GAMES REVEALED

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Enough of what we think – this is where you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…

WITH THE ARRIVAL of the much-anticipated *Resident Evil 4* for the GameCube, I decided I would bite the bullet and do something I rarely do – I would buy a triple-A title on release day for the full asking price. So off I went into the town centre, a few days after the release date, eager to part with my hard-earned cash. We have Game and Gamestation stores in town, so I had high hopes of at least one of them having the game.

I went to Game first. Despite there being a dozen or so *Resident Evil 4* cases on display, I was told that they were only available for customers who had pre-ordered. When I asked why they were on display then, I was informed that this was for 'marketing purposes' – marketing a product that they can't sell to customers? The sales assistant helpfully suggested that I try (their rival) Gamestation.

Gamestation also had plenty of display cases on their shelves, but when I took one to the counter to pay, I was told that they had sold out earlier that morning and didn't know when they might get some more stock.

Now, I could have easily purchased this game online and saved a few quid in the process, but I had decided that it was worth the extra £5 to get my hands on the game there and then, and support the local economy in the process. I'm sorry to say I won't make the effort again. From now on I will be buying online as my first choice.

If the games industry, and by that I mean the retailers but especially the publishers, cannot get their act together to provide adequate supplies of such eagerly awaited and high-demand products, then I'm afraid the future for them looks very bleak indeed.
Darren Staples

games™: Though we find your prediction pretty unlikely (high demand for a triple-A product is hardly a sign of the demise of an industry, is it?) we do sympathise with your predicament, as not being able to get a highly anticipated game can be frustrating. Unfortunately, it's a sign of the times that retailers are being a little cautious when ordering GameCube stock – hardly surprising given that the console hasn't performed particularly well. We'd recommend pre-ordering any games you intend to buy on the day of release, especially those that are considered triple-A titles; not because retailers can't do their job but because it's virtually impossible to satisfy demand for any major release, especially those few games that are headed to the Cube.

I AM WRITING to you out of disgust. Not with you, but with Ubisoft – a once friendly giant that has slowly but surely begun to walk and talk like Electronic Arts. My complaint is with its decision to delay *Rainbow Six: Lockdown* yet again, and with Ubisoft's clear disregard for the very people who have built its empire – their customers.

Check the web. There is a vast undercurrent of anger and disappointment at the way Ubisoft has treated its customers. *Lockdown* was ready to be launched on schedule, but was delayed to boost sales and coincide with the start of a new fiscal year. Holding a game back in order to improve it is one thing, but quietly delaying it and racking up pre-orders for yet more profit is inexcusable. I pre-ordered the game believing it would be released in March, then it was April, now it's June… or is it?

My point is this: it's understandable if a company wants to hold back a game in order

"AM I GOING TO STOP MY SON **PLAYING GTA UNTIL HE'S 18**, WHEN, HERE IN SCOTLAND, **HE COULD GET MARRIED** WITHOUT MY PERMISSION **AT 16?** I DON'T KNOW…"



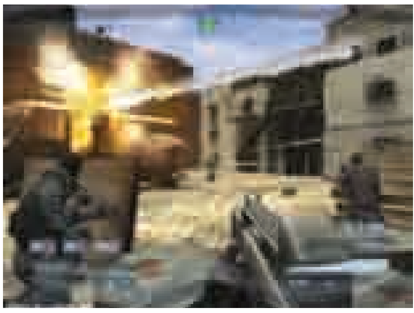
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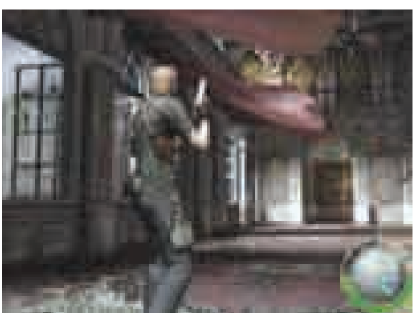
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So, the *Rainbow Six: Lockdown* delay. Money-minded betrayal of the fans, or a chance to fix a broken game before release?



Oh, the irony – GameCube software sales are struggling but can you get hold of *Resident Evil 4*? Can you dammit.

to comply with a financial strategy, but that changes when its customer service is plagued with fake release dates, misinformation and complete lack of transparency. If Ubisoft is leaving breathing room for *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, why leave it until this late stage to tell us that *Lockdown* is to be put back?

If you were to believe the conspiracy theories surrounding an EA takeover of Ubisoft, it would be that the former does not want its baby, *TimeSplitters*, competing with a hardened fighter like *Lockdown* – by far the most anticipated online shooter since *Halo 2*.

The problem is that the average person can do nothing to prevent a company like Ubisoft from duping and deceiving customers. There are enough casual gamers who will always be happy to wait and be trampled on, throwing their money at any glitchy game, for companies like Ubisoft to think it can get away with it. If it were any other industry, Ubisoft would be losing customers and credibility by the boatload and receiving numerous calls from trading standards.

Your magazine has always said it would confront publishers about such issues. I'm now asking you to do just that, to act as a gatekeeper who can represent the voice of the nation's gamers. Ubisoft has seemingly become oblivious to its customers. It chooses not to hear us – maybe you can get its attention.

Guy Robertson

games™: Down with your – and other people's – idle speculation. We've played *Rainbow Six: Lockdown* and, irrespective of any financial considerations, the game was broken. We suspect the decision to delay the game was as much about improving the game (something we heartily applaud) as it was about finding a suitable window to release it.

I'VE BEEN PLAYING games since the days of the humble ZX Spectrum and I've grown up with a console ever since, from the NES to the SNES to the PSone to the Xbox. I've watched graphics and sound evolve in ways I could never have conceived at the age of six when I watched coloured squares blip and bloop their way across the screen. Nowadays, I can sit and watch an almost exact likeness of Vin Diesel batter and bruise faces as spaceships rumble by and gunshots plug their way into the wall ahead of me.

'Games are becoming more realistic' is the phrase filling the forums of gaming circles across the globe, and it has been since the advent of 3D gaming. I'm writing to you to protest this against this view. Games are not becoming more realistic (nor should they have to); games are evolving into films. Scripted cut-scenes, on-rails sections, atmospheric music, shiny CGI creations…

This game/film theory can easily be explained with war games. Take the *Medal Of*

CONTACT

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Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

☐ Ive heard that Fire Warrior will b released on XBOX. Is there any truth in this?
games™: To be honest, we'd rather it hadn't been released on the PS2. As such, we're pleased to say that *Fire Warrior* won't be gracing the Xbox.

☐ Played PES4 on xboxlive an im gutted, it dusnt play anything like offline multiplayer PES, its like a copletly diff game. wats the deal?
games™: Konami messed up.

☐ Apparently Peter Wilstone cared enough to send the same letter to you and a rival mag.
games™: *Edge* actually gave us that letter as we were running short.

☐ Is it me or is the pace car in gt4 license's a pain in the arse?
games™: No, you're getting it confused with a tetanus jab.

☐ The big question on everyone's lips is. Will duke nukem zero hour be out on the ds?
games™: If that's the big question on everyone's lips then we really are in an awful lot of trouble…

☐ Whats up, couldnt b bothered 2 review NBA Street volume 3? Or is it just 2 shite?
games™: We assumed our readers wouldn't need guidance on that particular game.

☐ Don't you mean BIZARO cartoon network? BIZARO I LOVE YOU BIZARO I LOVE YOU!
games™: Nurse! The screens!

☐ Galleon? Average? As far as I recall u only gave it 4 (&u were probably being generous). Im not disagreeing with the point Peter Wilstone (Issue 30 contact) was making, but use galleon as an example 2 support the argument is just plain silly. The kind of silly just left 2 Monty Python!
games™: If Peter thinks that Galleon is an average but enjoyable game then we're quite happy to accept that. People are allowed to have their own opinions, you know.



■ Do great graphics create realism, or merely a Hollywood-style view of what realism should be like? Hmm, tricky one, that.



■ Is this a potential death trap? Only if you're Lynne Faulds Wood. We reckon your Xbox should be fire-free. For now…

Honor series: bombs fly past sending dirt scuttering through the air, people are shot down all around you, screams of anguish all around… Realistic enough, then the cinematic process kicks in: the harrowing violins howl over the sounds of explosions, people are shot while no blood is shed, the protagonist (the player), the out-and-out hero (probably American), the terrible and hideous (often deformed) bad guy (probably German or English) cackles in his tower above.

This is not realistic – this is the scene we see in every blockbuster in our cinemas. These are the things that excite us, these are the things that take us away from life and plop us in the middle of an exciting or scary environment with a safety barrier firmly in place. If gamers wanted realism, we'd all be playing *Burger Flipper Simulator*, scoring points by getting drunk and going home to cry yourself to sleep. Let's step away from reality.
David Douglas

games™: Videogames should offer a wide range of possibilities, be they based on reality or otherwise. Similarly, graphical boundaries are there to be pushed and gameplay should be challenged at every turn – it's what makes videogames interesting and relevant. So while we kind of agree with your point to some extent, we'd prefer things the way they are. One glance at the shelves in your local games store should be enough to show you that there's always something to cater for everyone's tastes.

☐ **I'M A HOUSEHUSBAND** with three children under five and I felt pretty smug after reading your article on the role of parents in preventing children from playing inappropriate computer games ('Watch With Mother', Issue 30). After all, I'm a keen gamer myself and I'll be doing the buying; it shouldn't be too hard working out what's suitable for my kids' age and maturity level as they grow older.

I've already had to stop my eldest from playing *Paper Mario 2* – he's good at the fights but for me to sit there for 30 hours reading the text wouldn't be fair on my other kids. Am I going to stop him playing *GTA* until he's 18, when, here in Scotland, he could get married without my permission at 16? I don't know. Still, armed with reviews and my own gaming experience, I should be able to make a decision and argue my case.

As I said, I was smug. Then some thoughts crossed my mind. Forty TV channels enter my house but all I watch is *Joey*, *24* and three flavours of *CSI*. I can't remember the last non-animated film I saw at the cinema. My CD collection stops at 1997. My video rental card has biodegraded and the library thinks I'm dead. Let's face it, I'll have little idea what my kids are listening to, watching or reading.



They'll probably have unsuitable friends as well. Games are only a small part of what they will be exposed to.

Every practical detail of drug use and benefit fraud I picked up as a teenager, I gathered from my parents' *Daily Mail* and from *News At Ten* (thanks, Trev!). Shielding children and teens from difficult issues is impossible without solitary confinement. It won't make good kids anyway, just ignorant ones.

Difficult issues should be a regular part of conversation. Those of us who are parents need to talk honestly and openly to our children about everything – sex, death, violence, drugs, sexuality, God, relationships, anger, money, failure, love, forgiveness, everything. We need to listen to them and discuss these issues – in short, we need to fill them full of real sense so that the nonsense can't take hold. It'll be tough, but I guess a shared interest in games should at least give me a place to start talking…

Ed Farro

games™: We get the impression you're a pretty level-headed and responsible parent, who also happens to have an interest in videogames. Unfortunately, and as the article you refer to highlighted, some parents don't share your understanding of games. While we accept that it's difficult to keep pace with all the media that a child can be exposed to, the games industry cannot be held responsible when parents continue to buy their kids games that are clearly labelled as suitable only for adults.

I'M SURE I'M not the only Xbox owner to have just received their Xbox Protection Cord after reading tales of spontaneously combusting consoles. I'd assumed there was simply a manufacturing fault in the cable itself. However, after opening the large parcel to find what appears to be a circuit breaker, I started to wonder just how well built Microsoft's lump is.

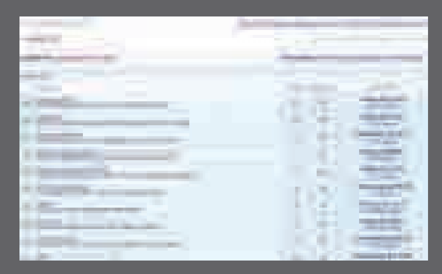
The cord's manual adds to the fears by stating "Your Xbox console may be susceptible to electrical problems that can cause damage or fire inside the console". It describes how the unit will disconnect the power "when it detects an electrical problem with the Xbox console".

Surely the problem lies within the console itself – I use a circuit breaker when I mow the lawn in case I cut through the cable, so I dread to think what potential hazard is in my Xbox. No doubt supplying these cords is cheaper for Microsoft than replacing the console, but will it be the gamers who once again have to front the cash when their purchased-at-launch, expensive consoles literally go up in smoke?

John Milbank

games™: Speculation has been rife that Microsoft has not been entirely honest about the real problem that's made it necessary for the replacement of some Xbox power cords, but we seriously doubt that the company would put lives at risk by ignoring such a major fault. As far as we are aware, the risk of your console spontaneously combusting is something like one in 10,000, and the new circuit breaker provided should remove any risk to you and your home. Under the circumstances, we believe that Microsoft should be commended for dealing with the problem in such an honest and calm way. Would you prefer it if it had done nothing?

"IF THE **GAMES INDUSTRY,** AND BY THAT I MEAN **THE RETAILERS** BUT **ESPECIALLY THE PUBLISHERS**, CANNOT GET **THEIR ACT** TOGETHER THEN **I'M AFRAID THE FUTURE** FOR THEM **LOOKS VERY BLEAK INDEED**"



FROM THE FORUM

DO YOU ENJOY NON-PLAYING YOUR GAMES?

Jetman
Bit of a strange question, but do you ever just look at your games and consoles without playing anything? Sometimes I just sit down and pick up various games to look at the artwork, manual, etc. I know it sounds daft, but someone else here has to do it, don't they?

village
Strangely enough I was doing it on Monday. I also sometimes just load a game up to watch the intro.

Duncan
Yes. I also read the manual and examine the discs. Think I'm paranoid about those scratches!

The Quadraxis
I do it now and then. I look at the game booklets and like to watch the opening movie for *SC2*. It's one of the best I've ever seen.

Duffman
Sorta. I have all these really great games on my shelf and sometimes I just can't be arsed to play any of them. I pick up box after box and think 'crap game', 'boring' – and the games among my collection are stuff like *Ninja Gaiden, PGR2, Halo, Rainbow Six, Splinter Cell, Burnout 3, PES4*! I think this because I've played them all to completion.

Hong Kong Phooey
Yep, guilty as charged – I recently got my Neo-Geo Pocket Color collection down from the loft and I've spent quite a few minutes just opening the game boxes and having a look at them.

RetroEd
Every now and then I'll go through my collection, read the box, have a browse through the manual and admire the cover. I'll then put it back and move on to the next game. I will also sometimes unpack my various consoles, have a good look at them, check and clean them (even though they don't need it), and then put them away again.

Matthew simpson
I am also guilty, although I catalogue them alphabetically as well.

Porkupine
Nope. I recently flat-packed all my N64/Game Boy boxes and put them in a box, probably never to be looked at again (in the near future), and I keep my PS2 games in a box and they are only removed whenever I want to play on them. I also keep my PS2 in a box – it looks too messy to be left out.

flint blackman
Oh yeah, I do that a lot – sometimes I just stand there thinking "so many games, so little time…". Other times I just look at one and think "what great times I had playing that". Weird indeed!

Sounds like half a salute from 24-carat sailor? (9)

